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# THE BOOK OF EXODUS

## FOUR SHAPING CENTURIES

'Now **these are** the names of the children of Israel, which came into Egypt: every man and his household came with Jacob. 2. Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, 3. Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin, 4. Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. 5. And all the souls that came out of the loins of Jacob were seventy souls: for Joseph was in Egypt already. 6. And Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation. 7. And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them. 8. Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph. 9. And he said unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we: 10. Come on, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land. 11. Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh treasure-cities, Pithom and Raamses. 12. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were grieved because of the children of Israel. 13. And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigour: 14. And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field: all their service, wherein they made them serve, was with rigour.'—EXODUS i. 1-14.

**THE** four hundred years of Israel's stay in Egypt were divided into two unequal periods, in the former and longer of which they were prosperous and favoured, while in the latter they were oppressed. Both periods had their uses and place in the shaping of the nation and its preparation for the Exodus. Both carry permanent lessons.

I. The long days of unclouded prosperity. These extended over centuries, the whole history of which is summed up in two words: death and growth. The calm years glided on, and the shepherds in Goshen had the happiness of having no annals. All that needed to be recorded was that, one by one, the first generation died off, and that the new generations 'were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty.' The emphatic repetitions recall the

original promises in Genesis xii. 2, xvii. 4, 5, xviii. 18. The preceding specification of the number of the original settlers (repeated from Genesis xlvi. 27) brings into impressive contrast the small beginnings and the rapid increase. We may note that eloquent setting side by side of the two processes which are ever going on simultaneously, death and birth.

One by one men pass out of the warmth and light into the darkness, and so gradually does the withdrawal proceed that we scarcely are aware of its going on, but at last 'all that generation' has vanished. The old trees are all cleared off the ground, and everywhere their place is taken by the young saplings. The web is ever being woven at one end, and run down at the other. 'The individual withers, but the race is more and more.' How solemn that continual play of opposing movements is, and how blind we are to its solemnity!

That long period of growth may be regarded in two lights. It effected the conversion of a horde into a nation by numerical increase, and so was a link in the chain of the divine working. The great increase, of which the writer speaks so strongly, was, no doubt, due to the favourable circumstances of the life in Goshen, but was none the less regarded by him, and rightly so, as God's doing. As the Psalmist sings, '*He increased His people greatly.*' 'Natural processes' are the implements of a supernatural will. So Israel was being multiplied, and the end for which it was peacefully growing into a multitude was hidden from all but God. But there was another end, in reference to which the years of peaceful prosperity may be regarded; namely, the schooling of the people to patient trust in the long-delayed fulfilment of the promise. That hope had burned bright in Joseph when he died, and he

being dead yet spake of it from his coffin to the successive generations. Delay is fitted and intended to strengthen faith and make hope more eager. But that part of the divine purpose, alas! was not effected as the former was. In the moral region every circumstance has two opposite results possible. Each condition has, as it were, two handles, and we can take it by either, and generally take it by the wrong one. Whatever is meant to better us may be so used by us as to worsen us. And the history of Israel in Egypt and in the desert shows only too plainly that ease weakened, if it did not kill, faith, and that Goshen was so pleasant that it drove the hope and the wish for Canaan out of mind. 'While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.' Is not Israel in Egypt, slackening hold of the promise because it tarried, a mirror in which the Church may see itself? and do *we* not know the enervating influence of Goshen, making us reluctant to shoulder our packs and turn out for the pilgrimage? The desert repels more strongly than Canaan attracts.

II. The shorter period of oppression. Probably the rise of a 'new king' means a revolution in which a native dynasty expelled foreign monarchs. The Pharaoh of the oppression was, perhaps, the great Rameses II., whose long reign of sixty-seven years gives ample room for protracted and grinding oppression of Israel. The policy adopted was characteristic of these early despotisms, in its utter disregard of humanity and of everything but making the kingdom safe. It was not intentionally cruel, it was merely indifferent to the suffering it occasioned. 'Let us deal *wisely* with them'—never mind about justice, not to say kindness. Pharaoh's 'politics,' like those of some other rulers who divorce them from morality, turned out to

be impolitic, and his 'wisdom' proved to be roundabout folly. He was afraid that the Israelites, if they were allowed to grow, might find out their strength and seek to emigrate; and so he set to work to weaken them with hard bondage, not seeing that that was sure to make them wish the very thing that he was blunderingly trying to prevent. The only way to make men glad to remain in a community is to make them at home there. The sense of injustice is the strongest disintegrating force. If there is a 'dangerous class,' the surest way to make them more dangerous is to treat them harshly. It was a blunder to make 'lives bitter,' for hearts also were embittered. So the people were ripened for revolt, and Goshen became less attractive.

God used Pharaoh's foolish wisdom, as He had used natural laws, to prepare for the Exodus. The long years of ease had multiplied the nation. The period of oppression was to stir them up out of their comfortable nest, and make them willing to risk the bold dash for freedom. Is not that the explanation, too, of the similar times in our lives? It needs that we should experience life's sorrows and burdens, and find how hard the world's service is, and how quickly our Goshens may become places of grievous toil, in order that the weak hearts, which cling so tightly to earth, may be detached from it, and taught to reach upwards to God. 'Blessed is the man . . . in whose heart are thy ways,' and happy is he who so profits by his sorrows that they stir in him the pilgrim's spirit, and make him yearn after Canaan, and not grudge to leave Goshen. Our ease and our troubles, opposite though they seem and are, are meant to further the same end,—to make us fit for the journey which leads to rest and home. We often misuse them both, letting the one sink us in



earthly delights and oblivion of the great hope, and the other embitter our spirits without impelling them to seek the things that are above. Let us use the one for thankfulness, growth, and patient hope, and the other for writing deep the conviction that this is not our rest, and making firm the resolve that we will gird our loins and, staff in hand, go forth on the pilgrim road, not shrinking from the wilderness, because we see the mountains of Canaan across its sandy flats.

### DEATH AND GROWTH

‘And Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation. 7. And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty. . . .’—EXODUS i. 6, 7.

THESE remarkable words occur in a short section which makes the link between the Books of Genesis and of Exodus. The writer recapitulates the list of the immigrants into Egypt, in the household of Jacob, and then, as it were, having got them there, he clears the stage to prepare for a new set of actors. These few words are all that he cares to tell us about a period somewhat longer than that which separates us from the great Protestant Reformation. He notes but two processes—silent dropping away and silent growth. ‘Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation. Plant by plant the leaves drop, and the stem rots and its place is empty. Seed by seed the tender green spikelets pierce the mould, and the field waves luxuriant in the breeze and the sunshine. ‘The children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly.’

I. Now, then, let us look at this twofold process which is always at work—silent dropping away and silent growth.

It seems to me that the writer, probably uncon-

sciously, being profoundly impressed with certain features of that dropping away, reproduces them most strikingly in the very structure of his sentence: 'Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation.' The uniformity of the fate, and the separate times at which it befell individuals, are strongly set forth in the clauses, which sound like the threefold falls of earth on a coffin. They all died, but not all at the same time. They went one by one, one by one, till, at the end, they were all gone. The two things that appeal to our imagination, and ought to appeal to our consciences and wills, in reference to the succession of the generations of men, are given very strikingly, I think, in the language of my text—namely, the stealthy assaults of death upon the individuals, and its final complete victory.

If any of you were ever out at sea, and looked over a somewhat stormy water, you will have noticed, I dare say, how strangely the white crests of the breakers disappear, as if some force, acting from beneath, had plucked them under, and over the spot where they gleamed for a moment runs the blue sea. So the waves break over the great ocean of time; I might say, like swimmers pulled under by sharks, man after man, man after man, gets twitched down, till at the end—'Joseph died, and all his brethren, and *all* that generation.'

There is another process going on side by side with this. In the vegetable world, spring and autumn are two different seasons; May rejoices in green leaves and opening buds, and nests with their young broods; but winter days are coming when the greenery drops and the nests are empty, and the birds flown. But the singular and impressive thing (which we should see if we were not so foolish and blind) which the writer of our

text lays his finger upon is that at the same time the two opposite processes of death and renewal are going on, so that if you look at the facts from the one side it seems nothing but a charnel-house and a Golgotha that we live in, while, seen from the other side, it is a scene of rejoicing, budding young life, and growth.

You get these two processes in the closest juxtaposition in ordinary life. There is many a house where there is a coffin upstairs and a cradle downstairs. The churchyard is often the children's playground. The web is being run down at the one end and woven at the other. Wherever we look—

‘Every moment dies a man,  
Every moment one is born.’

‘Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation. And the children of Israel . . . multiplied . . . exceedingly.’

But there is another thought here than that of the contemporaneousness of the two processes, and that is, as it is written on John Wesley's monument in Westminster Abbey, ‘God buries the workmen and carries on the work.’ The great Vizier who seemed to be the only protection of Israel is lying in ‘a coffin in Egypt.’ And all these truculent brothers of his that had tormented him, they are gone, and the whole generation is swept away. What of that? They were the depositories of God's purposes for a little while. Are God's purposes dead because the instruments that in part wrought them are gone? By no means. If I might use a very vulgar proverb, ‘There are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it,’ especially if God casts the net. So when the one generation has passed away there is the other to take up the work. Thus the text is a fitting introduction to the continuance of the

history of the further unfolding of God's plan which occupies the Book of Exodus.

II. Such being the twofold process suggested by this text, let us next note the lessons which it enforces.

In the first place, let us be quite sure that we give it its due weight in our thoughts and lives. Let us be quite sure that we never give an undue weight to the one half of the whole truth. There are plenty of people who are far too much, constitutionally and (perhaps by reason of a mistaken notion of religion) religiously, inclined to the contemplation of the more melancholy side of these truths; and there are a great many people who are far too exclusively disposed to the contemplation of the other. But the bulk of us never trouble our heads about either the one or the other, but go on, forgetting altogether that swift, sudden, stealthy, skinny hand that, if I might go back to my former metaphor, is put out to lay hold of the swimmer and then pull him underneath the water, and which will clasp us by the ankles one day and drag us down. Do you ever think about it? If not, surely, surely you are leaving out of sight one of what ought to be the formative elements in our lives.

And then, on the other hand, when our hearts are faint, or when the pressure of human mortality—our own, that of our dear ones, or that of others—seems to weigh us down, or when it looks to us as if God's work was failing for want of people to do it, let us remember the other side—'And the children of Israel . . . increased . . . and waxed exceeding mighty; . . . and the land was filled with them.' So we shall keep the middle path, which is the path of safety, and so avoid the folly of extremes.

But then, more particularly, let me say that this

double contemplation of the two processes under which we live ought to stimulate us to service. It ought to say to us, 'Do you cast in your lot with that work which is going to be carried on through the ages. Do you see to it that your little task is in the same line of direction as the great purpose which God is working out—the increasing purpose which runs through the ages.' An individual life is a mere little backwater, as it were, in the great ocean. But its minuteness does not matter, if only the great tidal wave which rolls away out there, in the depths and the distance amongst the fathomless abysses, tells also on the tiny pool far inland and yet connected with the sea by some narrow, long fiord.

If my little life is part of that great ocean, then the ebb and flow will alike act on it and make it wholesome. If my work is done in and for God, I shall never have to look back and say, as we certainly shall say one day, either here or yonder, unless our lives be thus part of the divine plan, 'What a fool I was! Seventy years of toiling and moiling and effort and sweat, and it has all come to nothing; like a long algebraic sum that covers pages of intricate calculations, and the *pluses* and *minuses* just balance each other; and the net result is a great round nought.' So let us remember the twofold process, and let it stir us to make sure that 'in our embers' shall be 'something that doth live,' and that not 'Nature,' but something better—God—'remembers what was so fugitive.' It is not fugitive if it is a part of the mighty whole.

But further, let this double contemplation make us very content with doing insignificant and unfinished work.

Joseph might have said, when he lay dying: 'Well!

perhaps I made a mistake after all. I should not have brought this people down here, even if I have been led hither. I do not see that I have helped them one step towards the possession of the land.' Do you remember the old proverb about certain people who should not see half-finished work? All our work in this world has to be only what the physiologists call functional. God has a great scheme running on through ages. Joseph gives it a helping hand for a time, and then somebody else takes up the running, and carries the purpose forward a little further. A great many hands are placed on the ropes that draw the car of the Ruler of the world. And one after another they get stiffened in death; but the car goes on. We should be contented to do our little bit of the work. Never mind whether it is complete and smooth and rounded or not. Never mind whether it can be isolated from the rest and held up, and people can say, 'He did that entire thing unaided.' That is not the way for most of us. A great many threads go to make the piece of cloth, and a great many throws of the shuttle to weave the web. A great many bits of glass make up the mosaic pattern; and there is no reason for the red bit to pride itself on its fiery glow, or the grey bit to boast of its silvery coolness. They are all parts of the pattern, and as long as they keep their right places they complete the artist's design. Thus, if we think of how 'one soweth and another reapeth,' we may be content to receive half-done works from our fathers, and to hand on unfinished tasks to them that come after us. It is not a great trial of a man's modesty, if he lives near Jesus Christ, to be content to do but a very small bit of the Master's work.

And the last thing that I would say is, let this double

process going on all round us lift our thoughts to Him who lives for ever. Moses dies; Joshua catches the torch from his hand. And the reason why he catches the torch from his hand is because God said, 'As I was with Moses so I will be with thee.' Therefore we have to turn away in our contemplations from the mortality that has swallowed up so much wisdom and strength, eloquence and power, which the Church or our own hearts seem so sorely to want: and, whilst we do, we have to look up to Jesus Christ and say, 'He lives! He lives! No man is indispensable for public work or for private affection and solace so long as there is a living Christ for us to hold by.'

Dear brethren, we need that conviction for ourselves often. When life seems empty and hope dead, and nothing is able to fill the vacuity or still the pain, we have to look to the vision of the Lord sitting on the empty throne, high and lifted up, and yet very near the aching and void heart. Christ lives, and that is enough.

So the separated workers in all the generations, who did their little bit of service, like the many generations of builders who laboured through centuries upon the completion of some great cathedral, will be united at the last; 'and he that soweth, and he that reapeth, shall rejoice together' in the harvest which was produced by neither the sower nor the reaper, but by Him who blessed the toils of both.

'Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation'; but Jesus lives, and therefore His people 'grow and multiply,' and His servants' work is blessed; and at the end they shall be knit together in the common joy of the great harvest, and of the day when the headstone is brought forth with shoutings of 'Grace! grace unto it.'

## THE ARK AMONG THE FLAGS

'And there went a man of the house of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi. 2. And the woman conceived, and bare a son: and when she saw him that he was a goodly child, she hid him thrc months. 3. And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein; and she laid it in the flags by the river's brink. 4. And his sister stood afar off, to wit what would be done to him. 5. And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to wash herself at the river; and her maidens walked along by the river's side; and when she saw the ark among the flags, she sent her maid to fetch it. 6. And when she had opened it, she saw the child: and, behold, the babe wept. And she had compassion on him, and said, This is one of the Hebrews' children. 7. Then said his sister to Pharaoh's daughter, Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee? 8. And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, Go. And the maid went and called the child's mother. 9. And Pharaoh's daughter said unto her, Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages. And the woman took the child, and nursed it. 10. And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses: and she said, Because I drew him out of the water.'—EXODUS ii. 1-10.

I. It is remarkable that all the persons in this narrative are anonymous. We know that the names of 'the man of the house of Levi' and his wife were Amram and Jochebed. Miriam was probably the anxious sister who watched what became of the little coffer. The daughter of Pharaoh has two names in Jewish tradition, one of which corresponds to that which Brugsch has found to have been borne by one of Rameses' very numerous daughters. One likes to think that the name of the gentle-hearted woman has come down to us; but, whether she was called 'Meri or not, she and the others have no name here. The reason can scarcely have been ignorance. But they are, as it were, kept in shadow, because the historian saw, and wished us to see, that a higher Hand was at work, and that over all the events recorded in these verses there brooded the informing, guiding Spirit of God Himself, the sole actor.

' Each only as God wills  
Can work—God's puppets, best and worst,  
Are we: there is no last nor first.'



II. The mother's motive in braving the danger to herself involved in keeping the child is remarkably put. 'When she saw that he was a goodly child, she hid him.' It was not only a mother's love that emboldened her, as it does all weak creatures, to shelter her offspring at her own peril, but something in the look of the infant, as it lay on her bosom, touched her with a dim hope. According to the Septuagint translation, both parents shared in this. And so the Epistle to the Hebrews unites them in that which is here attributed to the mother only. Stephen, too, speaks of Moses as 'fair in God's sight.' As if the prescient eyes of the parents were not blinded by love, but rather cleared to see some token of divine benediction resting on him. The writer of the *Hebrews* lifts the deed out of the category of instinctive maternal affection up to the higher level of faith. So we may believe that the aspect of her child woke some prophetic vision in the mother's soul, and that she and her husband were of those who cherished the hopes naturally born from the promise to Abraham, nurtured by Jacob's and Joseph's dying wish to be buried in Canaan, and matured by the tyranny of Pharaoh. Their faith, at all events, grasped the unseen God as their helper, and made Jochebed bold to break the terrible law, as a hen will fly in the face of a mastiff to shield her brood. Their faith perhaps also grasped the future deliverance, and linked it in some way with their child. We may learn how transfiguring and ennobling to the gentlest and weakest is faith in God, especially when it is allied with unselfish human love. These two are the strongest powers. If they are at war, the struggle is terrible: if they are united, 'the weakest is as David, and David as an angel of God.' Let us seek

ever to blend their united strength in our own lives.

Will it be thought too fanciful if we suggest that we are taught another lesson,—namely, that the faith which surrenders its earthly treasures to God, in confidence of His care, is generally rewarded and vindicated by receiving them back again, glorified and sanctified by the altar on which they have been laid? Jochebed clasped her recovered darling to her bosom with a deeper gladness, and held him by a surer title, when Miriam brought him back as the princess's charge, than ever before. We never feel the preciousness of dear ones so much, nor are so calm in the joy of possession, as when we have laid them in God's hands, and have learned how wise and wonderful His care is.

III. How much of the world's history that tiny coffer among the reeds held! How different that history would have been if, as might easily have happened, it had floated away, or if the feeble life within it had wailed itself dead unheard! The solemn possibilities folded and slumbering in an infant are always awful to a thoughtful mind. But, except the manger at Bethlehem, did ever cradle hold the seed of so much as did that papyrus chest? The set of opinion at present minimises the importance of the individual, and exalts the spirit of the period, as a factor in history. Standing beside Miriam, we may learn a truer view, and see that great epochs require great men, and that, without such for leaders, no solid advance in the world's progress is achieved. Think of the strange cradle floating on the Nile; then think of the strange grave among the mountains of Moab, and of all between, and ponder the same lesson as is taught in yet higher fashion by

Bethlehem and Calvary, that God's way of blessing the world is to fill men with His message, and let others draw from them. Whether it be 'law,' or 'grace and truth,' a man is needed through whom it may fructify to all.

IV. The sweet picture of womanly compassion in Pharaoh's daughter is full of suggestions. We have already noticed that her name is handed down by one tradition as 'Merris,' and that 'Meri' has been found as the appellation of a princess of the period. A rabbinical authority calls her 'Bithiah,' that is, 'Daughter of Jehovah'; by which was, no doubt, intended to imply that she became in some sense a proselyte. This may have been only an inference from her protection of Moses. There is a singular and very obscure passage in 1 Chronicles iv. 17, 18, relating the genealogy of a certain Mered, who seems to have had two wives, one 'the Jewess,' the other 'Bithiah, the daughter of Pharaoh.' We know no more about him or her, but Keil thinks that Mered probably 'lived before the exodus'; but it can scarcely be that the 'daughter of Pharaoh,' his wife, is our princess, and that she actually became a 'daughter of Jehovah,' and, like her adopted child, refused royal dignity and preferred reproach. In any case, the legend of her name is a tender and beautiful way of putting the belief that in her 'there was some good thing towards the God of Israel.'

But, passing from that, how the true woman's heart changes languid curiosity into tenderness, and how compassion conquers pride of race and station, as well as regard for her father's edict, as soon as the infant's cry, which touches every good woman's feelings, falls on her ear! 'One touch of nature makes the whole world kin.' All the centuries are as nothing; the strange garb and the stranger mental and spiritual

dress fade, and we have here a mere woman, affected, as every true sister of hers to-day would be, by the helpless wailing. God has put that instinct there. Alas that it ever should be choked by frivolity or pride, and frozen by indifference and self-indulgence! Gentle souls spring up in unfavourable soil. Rameses was a strange father for such a daughter. How came this dove in the vulture's cage? Her sweet pity beside his cold craft and cruelty is like the lamb couching by the lion. Note, too, that gentlest pity makes the gentlest brave. She sees the child is a Hebrew. Her quick wit understands why it has been exposed, and she takes its part, and the part of the poor weeping parents, whom she can fancy, against the savage law. No doubt, as Egyptologists tell us, the princesses of the royal house had separate households and abundant liberty of action. Still, it was bold to override the strict commands of such a monarch. But it was not a self-willed sense of power, but the beautiful daring of a compassionate woman, to which God committed the execution of His purposes.

And that is a force which has much like work trusted to it in modern society too. Our great cities swarm with children exposed to a worse fate than the baby among the flags. Legislation and official charity have far too rough hands and too clumsy ways to lift the little life out of the coffer, and to dry the tears. We must look to Christian women to take a leaf out of 'Bithiah's' book. First, they should use their eyes to see the facts, and not be so busy about their own luxury and comfort that they pass the poor pitch-covered box unnoticed. Then they should let the pitiful call touch their heart, and not steel themselves in indifference or ease. Then they should conquer prejudices of race,

pride of station, fear of lowering themselves, loathing, or contempt. And then they should yield to the impulses of their compassion, and never mind what difficulties or opponents may stand in the way of their saving the children. If Christian women knew their obligations and their power, and lived up to them as bravely as this Egyptian princess, there would be fewer little ones flung out to be eaten by crocodiles, and many a poor child, who is now abandoned from infancy to the Devil, would be rescued to grow up a servant of God. She, there by the Nile waters, in her gracious pity and prompt wisdom, is the type of what Christian womanhood, and, indeed, the whole Christian community, should be in relation to child life.

V. The great lesson of this incident, as of so much before, is the presence of God's wonderful providence, working out its designs by all the play of human motives. In accordance with a law, often seen in His dealings, it was needful that the deliverer should come from the heart of the system from which he was to set his brethren free. The same principle which sent Saul of Tarsus to be trained at the feet of Gamaliel, and made Luther a monk in the Augustinian convent at Erfurt, planted Moses in Pharaoh's palace and taught him the wisdom of Egypt, against which he was to contend. It was a strange irony of Providence that put him so close to the throne which he was to shake. For his future work he needed to be lifted above his people, and to be familiar with the Egyptian court as well as with Egyptian learning. If he was to hate and to war against idolatry, and to rescue an unwilling people from it, he must know the rottenness of the system, and must have lived close enough to it to know what went on behind the scenes, and how foully

it smelled when near. He would gain influence over his countrymen by his connection with Pharaoh, whilst his very separation from them would at once prevent his spirit from being broken by oppression, and would give him a keener sympathy with his people than if he had himself been crushed by slavery. His culture, heathen as it was, supplied the material on which the divine Spirit worked. God fashioned the vessel, and then filled it. Education is not the antagonist of inspiration. For the most part, the men whom God has used for His highest service have been trained in all the wisdom of their age. When it has been piled up into an altar, then 'the fire of the Lord' falls.

Our story teaches us that God's chosen instruments are immortal till their work is done. No matter how forlorn may seem their outlook, how small the probabilities in their favour, how divergent from the goal may seem the road He leads them, He watches them. Around that frail ark, half lost among the reeds, is cast the impregnable shield of His purpose. All things serve that Will. The current in the full river, the lie of the flags that stop it from being borne down, the hour of the princess's bath, the direction of her idle glance, the cry of the child at the right moment, the impulse welling up in her heart, the swift resolve, the innocent diplomacy of the sister, the shelter of the happy mother's breast, the safety of the palace,—all these and a hundred more trivial and unrelated things are spun into the strong cable wherewith God draws slowly but surely His secret purpose into act. So ever His children are secure as long as He has work for them, and His mighty plan strides on to its accomplishment over all the barriers that men can raise.

How deeply this story had impressed on devout

minds the truth of the divine protection for all who serve Him, is shown by the fact that the word employed in the last verse of our lesson, and there translated 'drawn,' of which the name 'Moses' is a form, is used on the only occasion of its occurrence in the Old Testament (namely Psalm xviii. 16, and in the duplicate in 2 Sam. xxii. 17) with plain reference to our narrative. The Psalmist describes his own deliverance, in answer to his cry, by a grand manifestation of God's majesty; and this is the climax and the purpose of the earthquake and the lightning, the darkness and the storm: 'He sent from above, He took me, He drew me out of many waters.' So that scene by the margin of the Nile, so many years ago, is but one transient instance of the working of the power which secures deliverance from encompassing perils, and for strenuous, though it may be undistinguished, service to all who call upon Him. God, who put the compassion into the heart of Pharaoh's dusky daughter, is not less tender of heart than she, and when He hears us, though our cry be but as of an infant, 'with no language but a cry,' He will come in His majesty and draw us from encompassing dangers and impending death. We cannot all be lawgivers and deliverers; but we may all appeal to His great pity, and partake of deliverance like that of Moses and of David.

### THE BUSH THAT BURNED, AND DID NOT BURN OUT

'And, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.'

EXODUS iii. 2.

It was a very sharp descent from Pharaoh's palace to the wilderness, and forty years of a shepherd's life

were a strange contrast to the brilliant future that once seemed likely for Moses. But God tests His weapons before He uses them, and great men are generally prepared for great deeds by great sorrows. Solitude is 'the mother-country of the strong,' and the wilderness, with its savage crags, its awful silence, and the unbroken round of its blue heaven, was a better place to meet God than in the heavy air of a palace, or the profitless splendours of a court.

So as this lonely shepherd is passing slowly in front of his flock, he sees a strange light that asserted itself, even in the brightness of the desert sunshine. 'The bush' does not mean one single shrub. Rather, it implies some little group, or cluster, or copse, of the dry thorny acacias, which are characteristic of the country, and over which any ordinary fire would have passed like a flash, leaving them all in grey ashes. But this steady light persists long enough to draw the attention of the shepherd, and to admit of his travelling some distance to reach it. And then—and then—the Lord speaks.

The significance of this bush, burning but not consumed, is my main subject now, for I think it carries great and blessed lessons for us.

Now, first, I do not think that the bush burning but not consumed, stands as it is ordinarily understood to stand, for the symbolical representation of the preservation of Israel, even in the midst of the fiery furnace of persecution and sorrow.

Beautiful as that idea is, I do not think it is the true explanation; because if so, this symbol is altogether out of keeping with the law that applies to all the rest of the symbolical accompaniments of divine appearances, all of which, without exception, set forth in



symbol some truth about God, and not about His Church; and all of which, without exception, are a representation in visible and symbolical form of the same truth which was proclaimed in articulate words along with them. The symbol and the accompanying voice of God in all other cases have one and the same meaning.

That, I think, is the case here also; and we learn from the Bush, not something about God's Church, however precious that may be, but what is a great deal more important, something about God Himself; namely, the same thing that immediately afterwards was spoken in articulate words.

In the next place, let me observe that the fire is distinctly a divine symbol, a symbol of God not of affliction, as the ordinary explanation implies. I need not do more than remind you of the stream of emblem which runs all through Scripture, as confirming this point. There are the smoking lamp and the blazing furnace in the early vision granted to Abraham. There is the pillar of fire by night, that lay over the desert camp of the wandering Israelites. There is Isaiah's word, 'The light of Israel shall be a flaming fire.' There is the whole of the New Testament teaching, turning on the manifestation of God through His Spirit. There are John the Baptist's words, 'He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.' There is the day of Pentecost, when the 'tongues of fire sat upon each of them.' And what is meant by the great word of the Epistle to the Hebrews, 'Our God is a consuming fire'?

Not Israel only, but many other lands—it would scarcely be an exaggeration to say, all other lands—

have used the same emblem with the same meaning. In almost every religion on the face of the earth, you will find a sacred significance attached to fire. That significance is not primarily destruction, as we sometimes suppose, an error which has led to ghastly misunderstandings of some Scriptures, and of the God whom they reveal. When, for instance, Isaiah (xxxiii. 14) asks, 'Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?' he has been supposed to be asking what human soul is there that can endure the terrors of God's consuming and unending wrath. But a little attention to the words would have shown that 'the devouring fire' and the 'everlasting burnings' mean God and not hell, and that the divine nature is by them not represented as too fierce to be approached, but as the true dwelling-place of men, which indeed only the holy can inhabit, but which for them is life. Precisely parallel is the Psalmist's question, 'Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord, and who shall stand in His holy place?'

Fire is the source of warmth, and so, in a sense, of life. It is full of quick energy, it transmutes all kinds of dead matter into its own ruddy likeness, sending up the fat of the sacrifices in wreathes of smoke that aspire heavenward; and changing all the gross, heavy, earthly dullness into flame, more akin to the heaven into which it rises.

Therefore, as cleansing, as the source of life, light, warmth, change, as glorifying, transmuting, purifying, refining, fire is the fitting symbol of the mightiest of all creative energy. And the Bible has consecrated the symbolism, and bade us think of the Lord Himself as the central fiery Spirit of the whole universe, a

spark from whom irradiates and vitalises everything that lives.

Nor should we forget, on the other side, that the very felicity of this emblem is, that along with all these blessed thoughts of life-giving and purifying, there does come likewise the more solemn teaching of God's destructive power. 'What maketh heaven, that maketh hell'; and the same God is the fire to quicken, to sanctify, to bless; and resisted, rejected, neglected, is the fire that consumes; the savour of life unto life, or the savour of death unto death.

And then, still further, notice that this flame is undying—steady, unflickering. What does that mean? Adopting the principle which I have already taken as our guide, that the symbol and the following oral revelation teach the same truth, there can be no question as to that answer. 'I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. **I AM THAT I AM.**'

That is to say, the fire that burns and does not burn out, which has no tendency to destruction in its very energy, and is not consumed by its own activity, is surely a symbol of the one Being whose being derives its law and its source from Himself, who only can say—'I AM THAT I AM'—the law of His nature, the foundation of His being, the only conditions of His existence being, as it were, enclosed within the limits of His own nature. You and I have to say, 'I am that which I have become,' or 'I am that which I was born,' or 'I am that which circumstances have made me.' He says, 'I AM THAT I AM.' All other creatures are links; this is the staple from which they all hang. All other being is derived, and therefore limited and changeful; this Being is underived, absolute, self-dependent, and there-

fore unalterable for evermore. Because we live we die. In living the process is going on of which death is the end. But God lives for evermore, a flame that does not burn out; therefore His resources are inexhaustible, His power unwearied. He needs no rest for recuperation of wasted energy. His gifts diminish not the store which He has to bestow. He gives, and is none the poorer; He works, and is never weary; He operates unspent; He loves, and He loves for ever; and through the ages the fire burns on, unconsumed and undecayed.

O brethren! is not that a revelation—familiar as it sounds to our ears now, blessed be God!—is not that a revelation of which, when we apprehend the depth and the preciousness, we may well fix an unalterable faith upon it, and feel that for us, in our fleeting days and shadowy moments, the one means to secure blessedness, rest, strength, life, is to grasp and knit ourselves to Him who lives for ever, and whose love is lasting as His life? ‘The eternal God, the Lord . . . fainteth not, neither is weary. They that wait upon Him shall renew their strength.’

The last thought suggested to me by this symbol is this. Regarding the lowly thorn-bush as an emblem of Israel—which unquestionably it is, though the fire be the symbol of God—in the fact that the symbolical manifestation of the divine energy lived in so lowly a shrine, and flamed in it, and preserved it by its burning, there is a great and blessed truth.

It is the same truth which Jesus Christ, with a depth of interpretation that put to shame the cavilling listeners, found in the words that accompanied this vision: ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ He said to the sneering

Sadducees, who, like all other sneerers, saw only the surface of what they were sarcastic about, 'Did not Moses teach you,' in the section about the bush, 'that the dead rise, when he said: I AM the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob.' A man, about whom it can once be said that God is his God, cannot die. Such a bond can never be broken. The communion of earth, imperfect as it is, is the prophecy of Heaven and the pledge of immortality. And so from that relationship which subsisted between the fathers and God, Christ infers the certainty of their resurrection. It seems a great leap, but there are intervening steps not stated by our Lord, which securely bridge the gulf between the premises and the conclusion. Such communion is, in its very nature, unaffected by the accident of death, for it cannot be supposed that a man who can say that God is *His* God can be reduced to nothingness, and such a bond be snapped by such a cause. Therefore Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are still living, 'for all' those whom we call dead, as well as those whom we call living, 'live unto Him,' and though so many centuries have passed, God still *is*, not *was*, their God. The relation between them is eternal and guarantees their immortal life. But immortality without corporeity is not conceivable as the perfect state, and if the dead live still, there must come a time when the whole man shall partake of redemption; and in body, soul, and spirit the glorified and risen saints shall be 'for ever with the Lord.'

That is but the fuller working out of the same truth that is taught us in the symbol 'the bush burned and was not consumed.' God dwelt in it, therefore it flamed; God dwelt in it, therefore though it flamed it never flamed out. Or in other words, the Church, the individual in whom He dwells, partakes of the im-

mortality of the indwelling God. 'Every one shall be salted with fire,' which shall be preservative and not destructive; or, as Christ has said, 'Because I live ye shall live also.'

Humble as was the little, ragged, sapless thorn-bush, springing up and living its solitary life amidst the sands of the desert, it was not too humble to hold God; it was not too gross to burst into flame when He came; it was not too fragile to be gifted with undying being; like His that abode in it. And for us each the emblem may be true. If He dwell in us we shall live as long as He lives, and the fire that He puts in our heart shall be a fountain of fire springing up into life everlasting.

### THE CALL OF MOSES

'Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth My people the children of Israel, out of Egypt. 11. And Moses said unto God, Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt? 12. And He said, Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain. 13. And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is His name? what shall I say unto them? 14. And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and He said, thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. 15. And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations. 16. Go, and gather the elders of Israel together, and say unto them, The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared unto me, saying, I have surely visited you, and seen that which is done to you in Egypt: 17. And I have said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt unto the land of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, unto a land flowing with milk and honey. 18. And they shall hearken to thy voice: and thou shalt come, thou and the elders of Israel, unto the king of Egypt, and ye shall say unto him, The Lord God of the Hebrews hath met with us: and now let us go, we beseech Thee, three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God. 19. And I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not by a mighty hand. 20. And I will stretch out my hand, and smite Egypt with all My wonders which I will do in the midst thereof: and after that he will let you go.'—EXODUS III. 10-20.

THE 'son of Pharaoh's daughter' had been transformed, by nearly forty years of desert life, into an Arab

shepherd. The influences of the Egyptian court had faded from him, like colour from cloth exposed to the weather; nor is it probable that, after the failure of his early attempt to play the deliverer to Israel, he nourished further designs of that sort. He appears to have settled down quietly to be Jethro's son-in-law, and to have lived a modest, still life of humble toil. He had flung away fair prospects,—and what had he made of it? The world would say 'Nothing,' as it ever does about those who despise material advantages and covet higher good. Looking after sheep in the desert was a sad downcome from the possibility of sitting on the throne of Egypt. Yes, but it was in the desert that the vision of the bush burning, and not burning out, came; and it would not have come if Moses had been in a palace.

This passage begins in the midst of the divine communication which followed and interpreted the vision. We note, first, the divine charge and the human shrinking from the task. It was a startling transition from verse 9, which declares God's pitying knowledge of Israel's oppression, to verse 10, which thrusts Moses forward into the thick of dangers and difficulties, as God's instrument. 'I will send thee' must have come like a thunder-clap. The commander's summons which brings a man from the rear rank and sets him in the van of a storming-party may well make its receiver shrink. It was not cowardice which prompted Moses' answer, but lowliness. His former impetuous confidence had all been beaten out of him. Time was when he was ready to take up the *rôle* of deliverer at his own hand; but these hot days were past, and age and solitude and communion with God had mellowed him into humility. His recoil was but one

instance of the shrinking which all true, devout men feel when designated for tasks which may probably make life short, and will certainly make it hard. All prophets and reformers till to-day have had the same feeling. Men who can do such work as the Jeremiahs, Pauls, Luthers, Cromwells, can do, are never forward to begin it.

Self-confidence is not the temper which God uses for His instruments. He works with 'bruised reeds,' and breathes His strength into them. It is when a man says 'I can do nothing,' that he is fit for God to employ. 'When I am weak, then I am strong.' Moses remembered enough of Egypt to know that it was no slight peril to front Pharaoh, and enough of Israel not to be particularly eager to have the task of leading them. But mark that there is no refusal of the charge, though there is profound consciousness of inadequacy. If we have reason to believe that any duty, great or small, is laid on us by God, it is wholesome that we should drive home to ourselves our own weakness, but not that we should try to shuffle out of the duty because we are weak. Moses' answer was more of a prayer for help than of a remonstrance, and it was answered accordingly.

God deals very gently with conscious weakness. 'Certainly I will be with thee.' Moses' estimate of himself is quite correct, and it is the condition of his obtaining God's help. If he had been self-confident, he would have had no longing for, and no promise of, God's presence. In all our little tasks we may have the same assurance, and, whenever we feel that they are too great for us, the strength of that promise may be ours. God sends no man on errands which He does not give him power to do. So Moses had not



to calculate the difference between his feebleness and the strength of a kingdom. Such arithmetic left out one element, which made all the difference in the sum total. 'Pharaoh *versus* Moses' did not look a very hopeful cause, but 'Pharaoh *versus* Moses and Another'—that other being God—was a very different matter. God and I are always stronger than any antagonists. It was needless to discuss whether Moses was able to cope with the king. That was not the right way of putting the problem. The right way was, Is God able to do it?

The sign given to Moses is at first sight singular, inasmuch as it requires faith, and can only be a confirmation of his mission when that mission is well accomplished. But there was a help to present faith even in it, for the very sacredness of the spot hallowed now by the burning bush was a kind of external sign of the promise.

One difficulty being solved, Moses raised another, but not in the spirit of captiousness or reluctance. God is very patient with us when we tell Him the obstacles which we seem to see to our doing His work. As long as these are presented in good faith, and with the wish to have them cleared up, He listens and answers. The second question asked by Moses was eminently reasonable. He pictures to himself his addressing the Israelites, and their question, What is the name of this God who has sent you? Apparently the children of Israel had lost much of their ancestral faith, and probably had in many instances fallen into idolatry. We do not know enough to pronounce with confidence on that point, nor how far the great name of Jehovah had been used before the time of Moses, or had been forgotten in Egypt.

The questions connected with these points and with the history of the name do not enter into our present purpose. My task is rather to point out the religious significance of the self-revelation of God contained in the name, and how it becomes the foundation of Israel's deliverance, existence, and prerogatives. Whatever opinions are adopted as to the correct form of the name and other grammatical and philological questions, there is no doubt that it mainly reveals God as self-existent and unchangeable. He draws His being from no external source, nor 'borrows leave to be.' Creatures are what they are made or grow to be; they are what they were not; they are what they will some time not any more be. But He is what He is. Lifted above time and change, self-existing and self-determined, He is the fountain of life, the same for ever.

This underived, independent, immutable being is a Person who can speak to men, and can say 'I am.' Being such, He has entered into close covenant relations with men, and has permitted Himself to be called 'the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.' The name Jehovah lifts Him high above all creatures; the name 'the God of your fathers' brings Him into tender proximity with men, and, in combination with the former designation, guarantees that He will for ever be what He has been, even to all generations of children's children. That mighty name is, indeed, His 'memorial to all generations,' and is as fresh and full of blessedness to us as to the patriarchs. Christ has made us understand more of the treasures for heart and mind and life which are stored in it. 'Our Father which art in heaven' is the unfolding of its inmost meaning.

We may note that the bush burning but not consumed expressed in symbol the same truth which the name reveals. It seems a mistake to take the bush as the emblem of Israel surviving persecution. Rather the revelation to the eye says the same thing as that to the ear, as is generally the case. As the desert shrub flamed, and yet did not burn away, so that divine nature is not wearied by action nor exhausted by bestowing, nor has its life any tendency towards ending or extinction, as all creatural life has.

The closing verses of this passage (vs. 16-20) are a programme of Moses' mission, in which one or two points deserve notice. First, the general course of it is made known from the beginning. Therein Moses was blessed beyond most of God's servants, who have to risk much and to labour on, not knowing which shall prosper. If we could see, as he did, the lie of the country beforehand, our journeys would be easier. So we often think, but we know enough of what shall be to enable us to have quiet hearts; and it is best for us not to see what is to fail and what to succeed. Our ignorance stimulates effort, and drives to clinging to God's hand.

Then we may note the full assurances to be given to the 'elders of Israel.' Apparently some kind of civic organisation had been kept up, and there were principal people among the slaves who had to be galvanised first into enthusiasm. So they are to be told two things,—that Jehovah has appeared to Moses, and that He, not Moses only, will deliver them and plant them in the land. The enumeration of the many tribes (v. 17) might discourage, but it is intended to fire by the thought of the breadth of the land, which is further described as fertile. The more exalted our

conceptions of the inheritance, the more willing shall we be to enter on the pilgrimage towards it. The more we realise that Jehovah has promised to lead us thither, the more willing shall we be to face difficulties and dangers.

The directions as to the opening of communications with Pharaoh have often been made a difficulty, as if there was trickery in the modest request for permission to go three days' journey into the wilderness. But that request was to be made, knowing that it would not be granted. It was to be a test of Pharaoh's willingness to submit to Jehovah. Its very smallness made it so more effectually. If he had any disposition to listen to the voice speaking through Moses, he would yield that small point. It is useless to speculate on what would have happened if he had done so. But probably the Israelites would have come back from their sacrificing.

Of more importance is it to note that the failure of the request was foreseen, and yet the effort was to be made. Is not that the same paradox which meets us in all the divine efforts to win over hard-hearted men to His service? Is it not exactly what our Lord did when He appealed to Judas, while knowing that all would be vain?

The expression in verse 19, 'not by a mighty hand,' is very obscure. It may possibly mean that Pharaoh was so obstinate that no human power was strong enough to bend his will. Therefore, in contrast to the 'mighty hand' of man, which was not mighty enough for this work, God will stretch out His hand, and that will suffice to compel obedience from the proudest. God can force men by His might to comply with His will, so far as external acts go; but He does not regard that as obedience, nor delight in it. We

can steel ourselves against men's power, but God's hand can crush and break the strongest will. 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.' It is a blessed thing to put ourselves into them, in order to be moulded by their loving touch. The alternative is laid before every soul of man.

## A LAST MERCIFUL WARNING

'And the Lord said unto Moses, Yet will I bring one plague more upon Pharaoh, and upon Egypt; afterwards he will let you go hence: when he shall let you go, he shall surely thrust you out hence altogether. 2. Speak now in the ears of the people, and let every man borrow of his neighbour, and every woman of her neighbour, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold. 3. And the Lord gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians. Moreover, the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's servants, and in the sight of the people. 4. And Moses said, Thus saith the Lord, About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt: 5. And all the first-born in the land of Egypt shall die, from the first-born of Pharaoh that sitteth upon his throne, even unto the first-born of the maid-servant that is behind the mill; and all the first-born of beasts. 6. And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there was none like it, nor shall be like it any more. 7. But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast: that ye may know how that the Lord doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel. 8. And all these thy servants shall come down unto Me, and bow themselves unto Me, saying, Get Thee out, and all the people that follow Thee: and after that I will go out. And he went out from Pharaoh in a great anger. 9. And the Lord said unto Moses, Pharaoh shall not hearken unto you; that My wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt. 10. And Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh: and the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, so that he would not let the children of Israel go out of his land.'—EXODUS xi. 1-10.

THE first point to be noted in this passage is that it interposes a solemn pause between the preceding ineffectual plagues and the last effectual one. There is an awful lull in the storm before the last crashing hurricane which lays every obstacle flat. 'There is silence in heaven' before the final peal of thunder. Verses 1 to 3 seem, at first sight, out of place, as interrupting the narrative, since Moses' denunciation and prophecy in verses 4 to 8 must have been spoken at the interview with Pharaoh which we find going on at the end of the preceding chapter. But it is

legitimate to suppose that, at the very moment when Pharaoh was blustering and threatening, and Moses was bearding him, giving back scorn for scorn, the latter heard with the inward ear the voice which made Pharaoh's words empty wind, and gave him the assurances and commands contained in verses 1 to 3, and that thus it was given him in that hour what he should speak; namely, the prediction that follows in verses 4 to 8. Such a view of the sequence of the passage makes it much more vivid, dramatic, and natural, than to suppose that the first verses are either interpolation or an awkward break referring to a revelation at some indefinite previous moment. When a Pharaoh or a Herod or an Agrippa threatens, God speaks to the heart of a Moses or a Paul, and makes His servant's face 'strong against their faces.'

The same purpose of parting off the preceding plagues from the past ones explains the introduction of verses 9 and 10, which stand as a summary of the whole account of these, and, as it were, draw a line across the page, before beginning the story of that eventful day and night of Israel's deliverance.

Moses' conviction, which he knew to be not his own thought but God's revelation of His purpose, pointed first to the final blow which was to finish Pharaoh's resistance. He had been vacillating between compliance and refusal, like an elastic ball which yields to compression and starts back to its swelling rotundity as soon as the pressure is taken off. But at last he will collapse altogether, like the same ball when a slit is cut in it, and it shrivels into a shapeless lump. Weak people's obstinate fits end like that. He will be as extreme in his eagerness to get rid of the Israelites as he had been in his determination to keep them. The

sail that is filled one moment tumbles in a heap the next, when the halyards are cut. It is a poor affair when a man's actions are shaped mainly by fear of consequences. Fright always drives to extremes. 'When he shall let you go, he shall surely thrust you out hence altogether.' Many a stout, God-opposing will collapse altogether when God's finger touches it. 'Can thy heart endure in the days that I shall deal with thee?'

Verses 2 and 3 appear irrelevant here, but the command to collect from the Egyptians jewels, which might be bartered for necessities, may well have been given to Moses simultaneously with the assurance that he would lead forth the people after the next plague, and the particulars of the people's favour and of Moses' influence in the eyes of the native inhabitants, come in anticipatively to explain why the request for such contributions was granted when made.

With the new divine command swelling in his heart, Moses speaks his last word to Pharaoh, towering above him in righteous wrath, and dwindling his empty threats into nothingness. What a contrast between the impotent rage of the despot, with his vain threat, 'Thou shalt die,' and the unblenching boldness of the man with God at his back! One cannot but note in Moses' prediction of the last plague the solemn enlargement on the details of the widespread calamity, which is not unfeeling gloating over an oppressor's misery, but a yearning to save from hideous misery by timely and plain depicting of it. There is a flash of national triumph in the further contrast between the universal wailing in Egypt and the untouched security of the children of Israel, but that feeling merges at once into the higher one of 'the Lord's' gracious action

in establishing the 'difference' between them and their oppressors. It is not safe to dwell on superiority over others, either as to condition or character, unless we print in very large letters that it is 'the Lord' who has made it. There is a flash, too, of natural triumph in the picture of the proud courtiers brought down to prostrate themselves before the shepherd from Horeb, and to pray him to do what their master and they had so long fought against his doing. And there is a most natural assertion of non-dependence on their leave in that emphatic 'After that *I will* go out.' He is not asserting himself against God, but against the cowering courtiers. 'Hot anger' was excusable, but it was not the best mood in which to leave Pharaoh. Better if he had gone out unmoved, or moved only to 'great heaviness and sorrow of heart' at the sight of men setting themselves against God, and rushing on the 'thick bosses of the Almighty's buckler' to their own ruin. Moses' anger we naturally sympathise with, Christ's meekness we should try to copy.

The closing verses, as we have already noticed, are a kind of summing-up of the whole narrative of the plagues and their effects on Pharaoh. They open two difficult questions, as to how and why it was that the effect of the successive strokes was so slight and transient. They give the 'how' very emphatically as being that 'Jehovah hardened Pharaoh's heart.' Does that not free Pharaoh from guilt? And does it not suggest an unworthy conception of God? It must be remembered that the preceding narrative employs not only the phrase that 'Jehovah hardened Pharaoh's heart,' but also the expression that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. And it is further to be noted that the latter expression is employed in the accounts of the



earlier plagues, and that the former one appears only towards the close of the series. So then, even if we are to suppose that it means that there was a direct hardening action by God on the man's heart, such action was not first, but subsequent to obstinate hardening by himself. God hardens no man's heart who has not first hardened it himself. But we do not need to conclude that any inward action on the will is meant. Was not the accumulation of plagues, intended, as they were, to soften, a cause of hardening? Does not the Gospel, if rejected, harden, making consciences and wills less susceptible? Is it not a 'savour of death unto death,' as our fathers recognised in speaking of 'gospel-hardened sinners'? The same fire softens wax and hardens clay. Whosoever is not brought near is driven farther off, by the influences which God brings to bear on us.

The 'why' is stated in terms which may suggest difficulties,—'that my wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt.' But we have to remember that the Old Testament writers are not wont to distinguish so sharply as more logical Westerns do between the actual result of an event and its purpose. With their deep faith in the all-ruling power of God, whatever had come to pass was what He had meant to come to pass. In fact, Pharaoh's obstinacy had not thwarted the divine purpose, but had been the dark background against which the blaze of God's irresistible might had shone the brighter. He makes the wrath of man to praise Him, and turns opposition into the occasion of more conspicuously putting forth His omnipotence.

## THE PASSOVER: AN EXPIATION AND A FEAST, A MEMORIAL AND A PROPHECY

'And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, 2. This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you. 3. Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house: 4. And if the household be too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbour next unto his house take it according to the number of the souls; every man according to his eating shall make your count for the lamb. 5. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take it out from the sheep, or from the goats: 6. And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening. 7. And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it. 8. And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. 9. Eat not of it raw, nor sodden at all with water, but roast with fire; his head with his legs, and with the purtenance thereof. 10. And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning; and that which remaineth of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire. 11. And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the Lord's passover. 12. For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the Lord. 13. And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt. 14. And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the Lord throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever.'—EXODUS xii. 1-14.

THE Passover ritual, as appointed here, divides itself into two main parts—the sprinkling of the sacrificial blood on the door-posts and lintels, and the feast on the sacrifice. These can best be dealt with separately. They were separated in the later form of the ritual; for, when there was a central sanctuary, the lambs were slain there, and the blood sprinkled, as in other expiatory sacrifices, on the altar, while the domestic feast remained unaltered. The former was more especially meant to preserve the Israelites from the destruction of their first-born; the latter as a permanent memorial of their deliverance. But both have perpetual fitness as prophetic of varying aspects of the Christian redemption.

### I. The ritual of the protecting blood.

In the hurry and agitation of that eventful day, it must have seemed strange to the excited people that they should be called upon to observe such a service. But its institution at that crisis is in accordance with the whole tone of the story of the Exodus, in which man is nothing and God all. Surely, never was national deliverance effected so absolutely without effort or blow struck. If we try to realise the state of mind of the Israelites on that night, we shall feel how significant of the true nature of their deliverance this summons to an act of worship, in the midst of their hurry, must have been.

The domestic character of the rite is its first marked feature. Of course, there were neither temple nor priests then; but that does not wholly account for the provision that every household, unless too few in number to consume a whole lamb, should have its own sacrifice, slain by its head. The first purpose of the rite, to provide for the safety of each house by the sprinkled blood, partly explains it; but the deepest reason is, no doubt, the witness which was thereby borne to the universal priesthood of the nation. The patriarchal order made each man the priest of his house. This rite, which lay at the foundation of Israel's nationality, proclaimed that a restricted priestly class was a later expedient. The primitive formation crops out here, as witness that, even where hid beneath later deposits, it underlies them all.

We have called the Passover a sacrifice. That has been disputed, but unreasonably. No doubt, it was a peculiar kind of sacrifice, unlike those of the later ritual in many respects, and scarcely capable of being classified among them. But it is important to keep its

strictly sacrificial character in view; for it is essential to its meaning and to its typical aspect. The proofs of its sacrificial nature are abundant. The instructions as to the selection of the lamb; the method of disposing of the blood, which was sprinkled with hyssop—a peculiarly sacrificial usage; the treatment of the remainder after the feast; the very feast itself,—all testify that it was a sacrifice in the most accurate use of the word. The designation of it as ‘a passover to the Lord,’ and in set terms as a ‘sacrifice,’ in verse 27 and elsewhere, to say nothing of its later form when it became a regular Temple sacrifice, or of Paul’s distinct language in 1 Corinthians v. 7, or of Peter’s quotation of the very words of verse 5, applied to Christ, ‘a lamb without blemish,’ all point in the same direction.

But if a sacrifice, what kind of sacrifice was it? Clearly, the first purpose was that the blood might be sprinkled on the door-posts and lintels, and so the house be safe when the destroying angel passed through the land. Such is the explanation given in verse 13, which is the divine declaration of its meaning. This is the centre of the rite; from it the name was derived. Whether readers accept the doctrines of substitution and expiation or not, it ought to be impossible for an honest reader of these verses to deny that these doctrines or thoughts are there. They may be only the barbarous notions of a half-savage age and people. But, whatever they are, there they are. The lamb without blemish carefully chosen and kept for four days, till it had become as it were part of the household, and then solemnly slain by the head of the family, was their representative. When they sprinkled its blood on the posts, they confessed that they stood in peril of the destroying angel by reason of their im-

purity, and they presented the blood as their expiation. In so far, their act was an act of confession, deprecation, and faith. It accepted the divinely appointed means of safety. The consequence was exemption from the fatal stroke, which fell on all homes from the palace to the slaves' hovel, where that red streak was not found. If any son of Abraham had despised the provision for safety, he would have been partaker of the plague.

All this refers only to exemption from outward punishment, and we are not obliged to attribute to these terrified bondmen any higher thoughts. But clearly their obedience to the command implied a measure of belief in the divine voice; and the command embodied, though in application to a transient judgment, the broad principles of sacrificial substitution, of expiation by blood, and of safety by the individual application of that shed blood.

In other words, the Passover is a Gospel before the Gospel. We are sometimes told that in its sacrificial ideas Christianity is still dressing itself in 'Hebrew old clothes.' We believe, on the contrary, that the whole sacrificial system of Judaism had for its highest purpose to shadow forth the coming redemption. Christ is not spoken of as 'our Passover,' because the Mosaic ritual had happened to have that ceremonial; but the Mosaic ritual had that ceremonial mainly because Christ is our Passover, and, by His blood shed on the Cross and sprinkled on our consciences, does in spiritual reality that which the Jewish Passover only did in outward form. All other questions about the Old Testament, however interesting and hotly contested, are of secondary importance compared with this. Is its chief purpose to prophesy of Christ, His

atoning death, His kingdom and church, or is it not? The New Testament has no doubt of the answer. The Evangelist John finds in the singular swiftness of our Lord's death, which secured the exemption of His sacred body from the violence inflicted on His fellow-sufferers, a fulfilment of the paschal injunction that not a bone should be broken; and so, by one passing allusion, shows that he recognised Christ as the true Passover. John the Baptist's rapturous exclamation, 'Behold the Lamb of God!' blends allusions to the Passover, the daily sacrifice, and Isaiah's great prophecy. The day of the Crucifixion, regarded as fixed by divine Providence, may be taken as God's own finger pointing to the Lamb whom He has provided. Paul's language already referred to attests the same truth. And even the last lofty visions of the Apocalypse, where the old man in Patmos so touchingly recurs to the earliest words which brought him to Jesus, echo the same conviction, and disclose, amidst the glories of the throne, 'a Lamb as it had been slain.'

## II. The festal meal on the sacrifice.

After the sprinkling of the blood came the feast. Only when the house was secure from the destruction which walked in the darkness of that fateful night, could a delivered household gather round the board. That which had become their safety now became their food. Other sacrifices were, at a later period, modelled on the same type; and in all cases the symbolism is the same, namely, joyful participation in the sacrifice, and communion with God based upon expiation. In the Passover, this second stage received for future ages the further meaning of a memorial. But on that first night it was only such by anticipation, seeing that

it preceded the deliverance which it was afterwards to commemorate.

The manner of preparing the feast and the manner of partaking of it are both significant. The former provided that the lamb should be roasted, not boiled, apparently in order to secure its being kept whole; and the same purpose suggested the other prescriptions that it was to be served up entire, and with bones unbroken. The reason for this seems to be that thus the unity of the partakers was more plainly shown. All ate of one undivided whole, and were thus, in a real sense, one. So the Apostle deduces the unity of the Church from the oneness of the bread of which they in the Christian Passover partake.

It was to be eaten with the accompaniments of bitter herbs, usually explained as memorials of the bondage, which had made the lives bitter, and the remembrance of which would sweeten their deliverance, even as the pungent condiments brought out the savour of the food. The further accompaniment of unleavened bread seems to have the same signification as the appointment that they were to eat with their garments gathered round their loins, their feet shod, and staves in hand. All these were partly necessities in their urgent hurry, and partly a dramatic representation for later days of the very scene of the first Passover. A strange feast indeed, held while the beat of the pinions of the destroying angel could almost be heard, devoured in hot haste by anxious men standing ready for a perilous journey, the end whereof none knew! The gladness would be strangely dashed with terror and foreboding. Truly, though they feasted on a sacrifice, they had bitter herbs with it, and, standing,

swallowed their portions, expecting every moment to be summoned to the march.

The Passover as a feast is a prophecy of the great Sacrifice, by virtue of whose sprinkled blood we all may be sheltered from the sweep of the divine judgment, and on which we all have to feed if there is to be any life in us. Our propitiation is our food. 'Christ for us' must become 'Christ in us,' received and appropriated by our faith as the strength of our lives. The Christian life is meant to be a joyful feast on the Sacrifice, and communion with God based upon it. We feast on Christ when the mind feeds on Him as truth, when the heart is filled and satisfied with His love, when the conscience clings to Him as its peace, when the will esteems the 'words of His mouth more than' its 'necessary food,' when all desires, hopes, and inward powers draw their supplies from Him, and find their object in His sweet sufficiency.

Nor will the accompaniments of the first Passover be wanting. Here we feast in the night; the dawn will bring freedom and escape. Here we eat the glad Bread of God, not unseasoned with bitter herbs of sorrow and memories of the bondage, whose chains are dropping from our uplifted hands. Here we should partake of that hidden nourishment, in such manner that it hinders not our readiness for outward service. It is not yet time to sit at His table, but to stand with loins girt, and feet shod, and hands grasping the pilgrim staff. Here we are to eat for strength, and to blend with our secret hours of meditation the holy activities of the pilgrim life.

That feast was, further, appointed with a view to its future use as a memorial. It was held before the deliverance which it commemorated had been accom-



plished. A new era was to be reckoned from it. The month of the Exodus was thenceforward to be the first of the year. The memorial purpose of the rite has been accomplished. All over the world it is still observed, so many hundred years after its institution, being thus, probably, the oldest religious ceremonial in existence. Once more aliens in many lands, the Jewish race still, year by year, celebrate that deliverance, so tragically unlike their homeless present, and with indomitable hope, at each successive celebration, repeat the expectation, so long cherished in vain, 'This year, here; next year, in the land of Israel. This year, slaves; next year, freemen.' There can be few stronger attestations of historical events than the keeping of days commemorating them, if traced back to the event they commemorate. So this Passover, like Guy Fawkes' Day in England, or Thanksgiving Day in America, remains for a witness even now.

What an incomprehensible stretch of authority Christ put forth, if He were no more than a teacher, when He brushed aside the Passover, and put in its place the Lord's Supper, as commemorating His own death! Thereby He said, 'Forget that past deliverance; instead, remember Me.' Surely this was either audacity approaching insanity, or divine consciousness that He Himself was the true Paschal Lamb, whose blood shields the world from judgment, and on whom the world may feast and be satisfied. Christ's deliberate intention to represent His death as expiation, and to fix the reverential, grateful gaze of all future ages on His Cross, cannot be eliminated from His founding of that memorial rite in substitution for the God-appointed ceremonial, so hoary with age and sacred in its significance. Like the Passover, the Lord's Supper

was established before the deliverance was accomplished. It remains a witness at once of the historical fact of the death of Jesus, and of the meaning and power which Jesus Himself bade us to see in that death. For us, redeemed by His blood, the past should be filled with His sacrifice. For us, fed on Himself, all the present should be communion with Him, based upon His death for us. For us, freed bondmen, the memorial of deliverance begun by His Cross should be the prophecy of deliverance to be completed at the side of His throne, and the hasty meal, eaten with bitter herbs, the adumbration of the feast when all the pilgrims shall sit with Him at His table in His kingdom. Past, present, and future should all be to us saturated with Jesus Christ. Memory should furnish hope with colours, canvas, and subjects for her fair pictures, and both be fixed on 'Christ our Passover, sacrificed for us.'

### THOUGHT, DEED, WORD

'It shall be for a sign unto thee upon thine hand, and for a memorial between thine eyes, that the Lord's law may be in thy mouth.'—EXODUS xiii. 9.

THE question may be asked, whether this command is to be taken metaphorically or literally. No doubt the remembrance of the great deliverance was intrusted to acts. Besides the annual Passover feasts, inscriptions on the door-posts and fringes on the dress were appointed for this purpose. And the Jews from a very early period, certainly before our Lord's time, wore phylacteries fastened, as this and other places prescribe, on the left arm and on the forehead, and alleged these

words as the commandment which they therein obeyed. But it seems more probable that the meaning is metaphorical, and that what is enjoined is rather a constant remembrance of the great deliverance, and a constant regulation of the practical life by it. For what is it that is to be 'a sign'? It is the Passover feast. And the 'therefore' of the next verse seems to say that keeping this ordinance in its season is the fulfilment of this precept. Besides, the expression 'for a sign,' 'for a memorial,' may just as well mean 'it shall serve as,' or 'it shall be like,' as 'you shall wear.' So I think we must say that this is a figure, not a fact; the enjoining of an object for thought and a motive for life, not of a formal observance. And it is very characteristic of the Jew, and of the universal tendency to harden and lower religion into outward rites, that a command so wide and profound was supposed to be kept by fastening little boxes with four slips of parchment containing extracts from the Pentateuch on arm and forehead. Jewish rabbis are not the only people who treat God's law like that. Even if literal, the injunction is for the purpose of remembering. Taking that meaning, then, the text sets forth principles that apply quite as much to us. You will observe 'hand,' 'eyes,' 'mouth'; the symbols of practice, knowledge, expression; work, thought, and word. Observe also that there is a slight change in construction in the three clauses; the two former are to be done in order that the latter may come to pass. Then the memorial of the great deliverance is to be 'on the hand' and 'before the eyes,' in order that 'the Lord's law' may be 'in the mouth.' Keeping these points in view—

I. God's great deliverance should be constantly before our thoughts.

It is more than an accident that both Judaism and Christianity should begin with a great act of deliverance; that that act of deliverance should constitute a community, and that a memorial rite should be the centre of the ritual of both. The Lord's Supper historically took the place of the Passover. It was instituted at the Passover and instead of it. It is precisely the same in design, a memorial feast appointed to keep up the vivid remembrance of the historical fact to which redemption is traced; and not only to keep up its remembrance, but to proclaim the importance of extending that remembrance through all life.

Notice the peculiarity of both the Jewish and the Christian rite, that the centre point of both is a historical fact, a redeeming act. Judaism and Christianity are the only religions in regard to which this is true to anything like the same extent or in the same way. Christianity as a revelation is not so much the utterance in words of great religious thoughts as the history of a life and a death, a fact wrought upon the earth, which is at once the means of revelation and the means of redemption. This is a feature unshared by other religions.

This characteristic determines the principal object of our religious thought. The true object for religious thought is Christ, and His life and death.

All religious truth flows from and is wrapped up in that: *e.g.* theology, or the nature of God; anthropology, or the nature of man; soteriology, morality, etc. All truth for the individual and for the race has its source in God's great redeeming act. Religious emotion is best fed at this source, *e.g.* thankfulness, wonder, love: all these transcendent feelings which are melted

together in adoration. Here is where they are kindled. You cannot pump them up, or bring them into existence by willing, or scourge yourself into them, any more than you can make a seed grow by pulling at the germ with a pair of pincers, but this gives the warmth and moisture which make it germinate.

The clear perception of this truth is valuable, as correcting false tendencies in religion, *e.g.* the tendency to be much occupied with the derived truths, and to think of them almost to the exclusion of the great fact from which they come; the tendency to substitute melancholy self-inspection for objective facts; the tendency to run out into mere feeling.

The command requires of us a habitual occupation of mind with the great deliverance.

And the habitual presence of this thought will be best secured by specific times of occupation with it. Let every Christian practise the habit of meditation, which in an age of so many books, newspapers, and the distractions of our busy modern life, is apt to become obsolete.

II. The great deliverance is to be ever present in practical life.

The 'hand' is clearly the seat and home of power and practical effort. So the remembrance is to be present and to preside over our practical work.

How it is fitted to do so.

(a) It gives the law for all our activity.

The pattern. The death as well as the life of Christ teaches us what we ought to be.

The motive. He died for me! Shall I not serve Him who redeemed me?

(b) That remembered deliverance arms us against temptations, and lifts us above sinking into sin.

How blessed such a life would be! How victorious over the small motives that rule one's life, the deadening influence of routine, the duties that are felt to be overwhelmingly great and those that are felt to be wearisomely and monotonously small! How this unity of motive would give unity to life and simplify its problems! How it would free us from many a perplexity! There are so many things that seem doubtful because we do not bring the test of the highest motive to bear on them. Complications would fall away when we only wished to know and be like Christ. Many a tempting amusement, or occupation, or speculation would start up in its own shape when this Ithuriel spear touched it. How it would save from distractions! How strong it would make us, like a belt round the waist bracing the muscles tighter! 'This one thing I do' is always a strengthening principle.

How far is this possible? Not absolutely, but we may approximate very closely and indefinitely towards it. For there is the possibility of such thought blending with common motives, like a finer perfume in the scentless air, or some richer elixir in a cup. There is the possibility of its doing to other motives what light does to landscape when a sudden sunbeam gleams across the plain, and everything leaps into increased depth of colour. Let us try more and more to rescue life from the slavery of habit and the distractions of all these smaller forces, and to bring it into the greatness and power of submission to the dominion of this sovereign, unifying motive. Our lives would thus be greatened and strengthened, even as Germany and Italy have been, by being delivered from a rabble of petty dukes and brought under the sway of one emperor or king. Let us try to approach nearer and nearer to the fusion of

action and contemplation, and to the blending with all other motives of this supreme one.

This command supplies us with an easily applied and effective test. Is there any place where you cannot take it, any act which you feel it would be impossible to do for His sake? Avoid such. Where the safety-lamp burns blue and goes out, is no place for you.

It is a beautiful thought that Jesus does for us what we are thus commanded to do for Him. The high priest bore the names of the tribes on his shoulders and in his heart. 'I have graven thee on the palms of my hands.' We bear Him in our hands and in our hearts. 'I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.'

III. The great deliverance is to be ever on our lips.

The three regions here named are the inward thought, the outward practice, and the testimony of the lips. Note that that testimony is a consequence of thought and practice.

1. The purpose of the deliverance is to make 'prophets of His law.' Such was the divine intention as to Israel. Such is God's purpose as to all Christians. The very meaning of redemption is there. He has 'opened our lips' that we 'should show forth His praise.' He has regard to 'His own name.' He desires to make us vocal, for the same purpose for which a man strings a harp, to bring sweet music out of it. Words of testimony are a form of love.

2. The other two are incomplete without this vocal testimony.

3. The utterance of the lips, to be worth anything, must rest on and follow the other two. How noble, then, and blessed, how strong and calm and simple our lives would be, if we had this for the one great

object of our thoughts, of our practical endeavour, of our words, if all our being was sustained, impelled, made vocal, by one thought, one love!

O my brother, see to it that you give yourself to Him. That great Light will gladden your eyes, will guide your activity, and, like the sunrise striking Memnon's voiceless, stony lips, will bring music. Thought will have one boundless home of 'many mansions.' Work will have one law, one motive, its consecration and strength; and as in some solemn procession, all our steps and all our movements will keep time to the music of our praise to 'Him who loved us.'

### A PATH IN THE SEA

'And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: 20. And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night. 21. And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. 22. And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left. 23. And the Egyptians pursued, and went in after them to the midst of the sea, even all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. 24. And it came to pass, that in the morning watch the Lord looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians. 25. And took off their chariot-wheels, that they drave them heavily: so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the Lord fighteth for them against the Egyptians. 26. And the Lord said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the sea, that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen. 27. And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled against it; and the Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. 28. And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them: there remained not so much as one of them. 29. But the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left. 30. Thus the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea-shore. 31. And Israel saw that great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord, and His servant Moses.'—EXODUS XIV. 19-31.

**THIS** passage begins at the point where the fierce charge of the Egyptian chariots and cavalry on the straggling



masses of the fugitives is inexplicably arrested. The weary day's march, which must have seemed as suicidal to the Israelites as it did to their pursuers, had ended in bringing them into a position where, as Luther puts it, they were like a mouse in a trap or a partridge in a snare. The desert, the sea, the enemy, were their alternatives. And, as they camped, they saw in the distance the rapid advance of the dreaded force of chariots, probably the vanguard of an army. No wonder that they lost heart. Moses alone keeps his head and his faith. He is rewarded with the fuller promise of deliverance, and receives the power accompanying the command, to stretch forth his hand, and part the sea. Then begins the marvellous series of incidents here recorded.

I. The first step in the leisurely march of the divine deliverance is the provision for checking the Egyptian advance and securing the safe breaking up of the Israelitish camp. The pursuers had been coming whirling along at full speed, and would soon have been amongst the disorderly mass, dealing destruction. There was no possibility of getting the crossing effected unless they were held at bay. When an army has to ford a river in the face of hostile forces, the hazardous operation is possible only if a strong rearguard is left on the enemy's side, to cover the passage. This is exactly what is done here. The pillar of fire and cloud, the symbol of the divine presence, passed from the van to the rear. Its guidance was not needed, when but one path through the sea was possible. Its defence was needed when the foe was pressing eagerly on the heels of the host. His people's needs determined then, as they ever do, the form of the divine presence and help. Long after, the prophet

seized the great lesson of this event, when he broke into the triumphant anticipation of a yet future deliverance,—which should repeat in fresh experience the ancient victory, ‘The Lord will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your rearward.’ In the place where the need is sorest, and in the form most required, there and that will God ever be to those who trust Him.

We can see here, too, a frequent characteristic of the miraculous element in Scripture, namely, its reaching its end not by a leap, but by a process. Once admit miracle, and it appears as if adaptation of means to ends was unnecessary. It would have been as easy to have transported the Israelites bodily and instantaneously to the other side of the sea, as to have taken these precautions and then cleft the ocean, and made them march through it. Legendary miracle would have preferred the former way. The Bible miracle usually adapts methods to aims, and is content to travel to its goal step by step.

Nor can we omit to notice the double effect of the one manifestation of the divine presence. The same pillar was light and darkness. The side which was cloud was turned to the pursuers; that which was light, to Israel. The former were paralysed, and hindered from advancing a step, or from seeing what the latter were doing; these, on the other hand, had light thrown on their strange path, and were encouraged and helped to plunge into the mysterious road, by the ruddy gleam which disclosed it. So every revelation is either light or darkness to men, according to the use they make of it. The ark, which slew Philistines, and flung Dagon prone on his own threshold, brought blessing to the house of Obedom. The

Child who was to be 'set for the fall,' was also for 'the rising of many.' The stone laid in Zion is 'a sure foundation,' and 'a stone of stumbling.' The Gospel is the savour of life unto life, or of death unto death. The same fire melts wax and hardens clay. The same Christ is salvation and destruction. God is to each of us either our joy or our dread.

II. The sudden march of the Egyptians having thus been arrested, there is leisure, behind the shelter of the fiery barrier, to take the next step in the deliverance. The sea is not divided in a moment. Again, we have a process to note, and that brought about by two things,—Moses' outstretched rod, and the strong wind which blew all night. The chronology of that fateful night is difficult to adjust from our narrative. It would appear, from verse 20, that the Egyptians were barred advancing until morning; and, from verse 21, that the wind which ploughed with its strong ploughshare a furrow through the sea, took all night for its work. But, on the other hand, the Israelites must have been well across, and the Egyptians in the very midst of the passage, 'in the morning watch,' and all was over soon after 'the morning appeared.' Probably the wind continued all the night, so as to keep up the pressure which dammed back the waters, but the path was passable some hours before the gale abated. It must have been a broad way to admit of some two million frightened people with wives and children effecting a crossing in the short hours of part of one night.

But though God used the wind as His besom to sweep a road clear for His people, the effect produced by ordinary means was extraordinary. No wind that ever blew would blow water in two opposite directions at once, as a man might shovel snow to right and left,

and heap it in mounds by the sides of the path that he dug. That was what the text tells us was done. The miracle is none the less a miracle because God employed physical agents, just as Christ's miracles were no less miraculous when He anointed blind eyes with moistened clay, or sent men to wash in Siloam, than when His bare word raised the dead or stilled the ocean. Wind or no wind, Moses' rod or no rod, the true explanation of that broad path cleared through the sea is—'the waters saw Thee, O God.' The use of natural means may have been an aid to feeble faith, encouraging it to step down on to the untrodden and slippery road. The employment of Moses and his rod was to attest his commission to act as God's mouth-piece.

III. Then comes the safe passage. It is hard to imagine the scene. The vivid impression made by our story is all the more remarkable when we notice how wanting in detail it is. We do not know the time nor the place. We have no information about how the fugitives got across, the breadth of the path, or its length. Characteristically enough, Jewish legends know all about both, and assure us that the waters were parted into twelve ways, one for each tribe, and that the length of the road was three hundred miles! But Scripture, with characteristic reticence, is silent about all but the fact. That is enough. We gather, from the much later and poetical picture of it in Psalm lxxvii., that the passage was accomplished in the midst of crashing thunder and flashing lightnings; though it may be doubted whether these are meant to be taken as real or ideal. At all events, we have to think of these two millions of people—women, children, and followers—plunging into the depths in the night.

What a scene! The awestruck crowds, the howling wind, perhaps the thunderstorm, the glow of the pillar glistening on the wet and slimy way, the full paschal moon shining on the heaped waters! How the awe and the hope must both have increased with each step deeper in the abyss, and nearer to safety! The Epistle to the Hebrews takes this as an instance of 'faith' on the part of the Israelites; and truly we can feel that it must have taken some trust in God's protecting hand to venture on such a road, where, at any moment, the walls might collapse and drown them all. They were driven to venture by their fear of Pharaoh; but faith, as well as fear, wrought in them. Our faith, too, is often called upon to venture upon perilous paths. We may trust Him to hold back the watery walls from falling. The picture of the crossing carries eternal truth for us all. The way of safety does not open till we are hemmed in, and Pharaoh's chariots are almost come up. It often leads into the very thick of what we deem perils. It often has to be ventured on in the dark, and with the wind in our faces. But if we tread it in faith, the fluid will be made solid, and the pathless passable, or any other apparent impossibility be realised, before our confidence shall be put to shame, or one real evil reach us.

IV. The next stage is the hot pursuit and the panic of the Egyptians. The narrative does not mark the point at which the pillar lifted and disclosed the escape of the prey. It must have been in the night. The baffled pursuers dash after them, either not seeing, or too excited and furious to heed where they were going. The rough sea bottom was no place for chariots, and they would be hopelessly distanced by the fugitives on foot. How long they stumbled and weltered we

are not told, but 'in the morning watch,' that is, while it was yet dark, some awful movement in the fiery pillar awed even their anger into stillness, and drove home the conviction that they were fighting against God. There is something very terrible in the vagueness, if we may call it so, of that phrase 'the Lord looked . . . through the pillar.' It curdles the blood as no minuteness of narrative would do. And what a thought that His look should be a trouble! 'The steady whole of the judge's face' is awful, and some creeping terror laid hold on that host of mad pursuers floundering in the dark, as that more than natural light flared on their path. The panic to which all bodies of soldiers in strange circumstances are exposed, was increased by the growing difficulty of advance, as the chariot wheels became clogged or the ground more of quicksand. At last it culminates in a shout of '*Sauve qui peut!*' We may learn how close together lie daring rebellion against God and abject terror of Him; and how in a moment, a glance of His face, a turn of His hand, bring the wildest blasphemer to cower in fear. We may learn, too, to keep clear of courses which cannot be followed a moment longer, if once a thought that God sees us comes in. And we may learn the miserable result of all departure from Him, in making what ought to be our peace and blessing, our misery and terror, and turning the brightness of His face into a consuming fire.

V. Then comes, at last, the awful act of destruction, of which a man is the agent and an army the victim. We must suppose the Israelites all safe on the Arabian coast, when the level sunlight streams from the east on the wild hurry of the fleeing crowd making for the Egyptian shore. What a solemn sight that young

morning looked on! The wind had dropped, the rod is stretched out, the sea returns to its strength; and after a few moments' despairing struggle all is over, and the sun, as it climbs, looks down upon the unbroken stretch of quiet sea, bearing no trace of the awful work which it had done, or of the quenched hatred and fury which slept beneath.

We can understand the stern joy which throbs so vehemently in every pulse of that great song, the first blossom of Hebrew poetry, which the ransomed people sang that day. We can sympathise with the many echoes in psalm and prophecy, which repeated the lessons of faith and gratitude. But some will be ready to ask, Was that triumphant song anything more than narrow national feeling, and has Christianity not taught us another and tenderer thought of God than that which this lesson carries? We may ask in return, Was it divine providence that swept the Spanish Armada from the sea, fulfilling, as the medal struck to commemorate it bore, the very words of Moses' song, 'Thou didst blow with Thy wind, the sea covered them'? Was it God who overwhelmed Napoleon's army in the Russian snows? Were these, and many like acts in the world's history, causes for thankfulness to God? Is it not true that, as has been well said, 'The history of the world is the judgment of the world'? And does Christianity forbid us to rejoice when some mighty and ancient system of wrong and oppression, with its tools and accomplices, is cleared from off the face of the earth? 'When the wicked perish, there is shouting.' Let us not forget that the love and gentleness of the Gospel are accompanied by the revelation of divine judgment and righteous retribution. This very incident has for its last echo in

Scripture that wonderful scene in the Apocalypse, where, in the pause before the seven angels bearing the seven plagues go forth, the seer beholds a company of choristers, like those who on that morning stood on the Red Sea shore, standing on the bank of the 'sea of glass mingled with fire,'—which symbolises the clear and crystalline depth of the stable divine judgments, shot with fiery retribution,—and lifting up by anticipation a song of thanksgiving for the judgments about to be wrought. That song is expressly called 'the song of Moses' and 'of the Lamb,' in token of the essential unity of the two dispensations, and especially of the harmony of both in their view of the divine judgments. Its ringing praises are modelled on the ancient lyric. It, too, triumphs in God's judgments, regards them as means of making known His name, as done not for destruction, but that His character may be known and honoured by men, to whom it is life and peace to know and love Him for what He is.

That final victory over 'the beast,' whether he be a person or a tendency, is to reproduce in higher fashion that old conquest by the Red Sea. There is hope for the world that its oppressors shall not always tyrannise; there is hope for each soul that, if we take Christ for our deliverer and our guide, He will break the chains from off our wrists, and bring us at last to the eternal shore, where we may stand, like the ransomed people, and, as the unsetting morning dawns, see its beams touching with golden light the calm ocean, beneath which our oppressors lie buried for ever, and lift up glad thanksgivings to Him who has 'led us through fire and through water, and brought us out into a wealthy place.'



## 'MY STRENGTH AND SONG'

'The Lord is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation. . . .'

EXODUS xv. 2.

THESE words occur three times in the Bible : here, in Isaiah xii. 2, and in Psalm cxviii. 14.

I. The lessons from the various instances of their occurrence. The first and second teach that the Mosaic deliverance is a picture-prophecy of the redemption in Christ. The third (Psalm cxviii. 14), long after, and the utterance of some private person, teaches that each age and each soul has the same mighty Hand working for it. 'As we have heard, so have we seen.'

II. The lessons from the words themselves.

(a) True faith appropriates God's universal mercy as a personal possession. '*My* Lord and *my* God!' 'He loved *me*, and gave Himself for *me*.'

(b) Each single act of mercy should reveal God more clearly as '*My* strength.' The 'and' in the second clause is substantially equivalent to 'for.' It assigns the reason for the assurance expressed in the first. Because of the experienced deliverance and God's manifestation of Himself in it as the author of 'salvation,' my faith wins happy increase of confidence that He 'is the strength of my heart.' Blessed they who bring that treasure out of all the sorrows of life!

(c) The end of His deliverances is 'praise.' 'He is my song.' This is true for earth and for heaven. The 'Song of Moses and the Lamb.'

## THE SHEPHERD AND THE FOLD

'... Thou hast guided them in Thy strength unto Thy holy habitation.'

EXODUS xv. 13.

WHAT a grand triumphal ode! The picture of Moses and the children of Israel singing, and Miriam and the

women answering: a gush of national pride and of worship! We belong to a better time, but still we can feel its grandeur. The deliverance has made the singer look forward to the end, and his confidence in the issue is confirmed.

I. The guiding God: or the picture of the leading. The original is 'lead gently.' Cf. Isaiah xl. 11, Psalm xxiii. 2. The emblem of a flock underlies the word. There is not only guidance, but gentle guidance. The guidance was gentle, though accompanied with so tremendous and heart-curdling a judgment. The drowned Egyptians were strange examples of gentle leading. But God's redemptive acts are like the guiding pillar of fire, in that they have a side that reveals wrath and evokes terror, and a side that radiates lambent love and kindles happy trust.

'In Thy strength.' Cf. Isaiah xl. 10, 'with strong hand.' 'He shall gently lead.' Note the combination with gentleness. That divine strength is the only power which is able to guide. We are so weak that it takes all His might to hold us up. It is His strength, not ours. 'My strength is made perfect in (thy) weakness.'

'To the resting-place of Thy holiness.' The word is used for pasture, or resting-places for cattle. Here it meant Canaan; for us it means Heaven—'the green pastures' of real participation in His holiness.

II. The triumphant confidence as to the future based upon the deliverance of the past. '*Hast*,' a past tense. It is as good as done. The believing use of God's great past, and initial mercy, to make us sure of His future.

(a) In that He will certainly accomplish it.

(b) In that even now there is a foretaste—rest in toil. He guides to the 'waters of resting.' A rest now (Heb. iv. 3); a rest 'that remaineth' (Heb. iv. 3, 9).

III. The warning against confidence in self. These

people who sang thus perished in the wilderness! They let go hold of God's hand, so they 'sank like lead.' So He will fulfil begun work (Philippians i. 6). Let us cleave to Him. In Hebrews iii. and iv. lessons are drawn from the Israelites not 'entering in.' See also Psalm xciv.

### THE ULTIMATE HOPE

'Thou shalt bring them in and plant them in the mountain of Thine inheritance. . . .'-EXODUS xv. 17.

I. THE lesson taught by each present deliverance and kindness is that we shall be brought to His rest at last.

(a) Daily mercies are a pledge and a pattern of His continuous acts. The confidence that we shall be kept is based upon no hard doctrine of final perseverance, but on the assurance that God is always the same, like the sunshine which has poured out for all these millenniums and still rushes on with the same force. Consider—

The inexhaustibleness of the divine resources.

The steadfastness of the divine purposes.

The long-suffering of the divine patience.

(b) Thus daily mercies should lead on our thoughts to heavenly things. They should not prison us in their own sweetness. We should see the great Future shining through them as a transparent, not an opaque medium.

(c) That ultimate future should be the great object of our hope. Surely it is chiefly in order that we may have the light of that great to-morrow brightening and magnifying our dusty to-days, that we are endowed with the faculty of looking forward and 'calling things that are not as though they were.' So we should engage and enlarge our minds with it.

II. The form which that ultimate future assumes.

The Israelites thought of Canaan, and in particular of 'Zion,' its centre-point.

(a) Perpetual rest. 'Bring in and plant'—a contrast to the desert nomad life.

(b) Perpetual safety. 'The sanctuary which Thy hands have established,' *i.e.* made firm.

(c) Perpetual dwelling in God. 'Thy dwelling,' 'Thy mountain,' 'Thy holy habitation' (ver. 13), rather than 'our land.' For Israel their communion with Jehovah was perfected on Zion by the Temple and the sacrifices, including the revelation of (priestly) national service.

(d) Perpetual purity. 'Thy sanctuary.' 'Without' holiness 'no man shall see the Lord.'

## MARAH

'And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter: therefore the name of it was called Marah. 24. And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink? 25. And he cried unto the Lord; and the Lord showed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet. . . .'—EXODUS xv. 23-25.

I. THE time of reaching Marah—just after the Red Sea. The Israelites were encamped for a few days on the shore to shake themselves together, and then at this, their very first station, they began to experience the privations which were to be their lot for forty years. Their course was like that of a ship that is in the stormy Channel as soon as it leaves the shelter of the pier at Dover, not like that of one that glides down the Thames for miles.

After great moments and high triumphs in life comes Marah.

Marah was just before Elim—the alternation, how blessed! The shade of palms and cool water of the wells, one for each tribe and one for each 'elder.' So we have alternations in life and experience.

II. The wrong and the right ways of taking the bitter experience. The people grumbled: Moses cried

to the Lord. The quick forgetfulness of deliverances. The true use of speech is not complaint, but prayer.

III. The power that changes bitter to sweet. The manner of the miracle is singular. God hides Himself behind Moses, and His miraculous power behind the material agent. Perhaps the manner of the miracle was intended to suggest a parallel with the first plague. There the rod made the Nile water undrinkable. There is a characteristic economy in the miraculous, and outward things are used, as Christ used the pool and the saliva and the touch, to help the weak faith of the deaf and dumb man.

What changes bitter to sweet for us?—the Cross, the remembrance of Christ's death. 'Consider Him that endured.' The Cross is the true tree which, when 'cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet.'

Recognition of and yielding to God's will: that is the one thing which for us changes all. The one secret of peace and of getting sweetness out of bitterness is loving acceptance of the will of God.

Discernment of purpose in God's 'bitter' dealings—'for our profit.' The dry rod 'budded.' The Prophet's roll was first bitter, then sweet. Affliction 'afterwards yieldeth the peaceable fruit.'

## THE BREAD OF GOD

'Then said the Lord unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in My law, or no. 5. And it shall come to pass, that on the sixth day they shall prepare that which they bring in; and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily. 6. And Moses and Aaron said unto all the children of Israel, At even, then ye shall know that the Lord hath brought you out from the land of Egypt: 7. And in the morning, then ye shall see the glory of the Lord; for that He heareth your murmurings against the Lord: and what are we, that ye murmur against us? 8. And Moses said, This shall be, when the Lord shall give you in the evening flesh to eat, and in the morning bread to the full; for that the Lord heareth your murmurings which ye murmur against Him: and what are we? your murmurings are not against us, but against the Lord. 9. And Moses spake unto Aaron, Say unto all the congregation of the children of

Israel. Come near before the Lord : for He hath heard your murmurings. 10. And it came to pass, as Aaron spake unto the whole congregation of the children of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and, behold, the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud. 11. And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 12. I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel: speak unto them, saying, At even ye shall eat flesh, and in the morning ye shall be filled with bread; and ye shall know that I am the Lord your God.—EXODUS XVI. 4-12.

UNBELIEF has a short memory. The Red Sea is forgotten in a month. The Israelites could strike their timbrels and sing their lyric of praise, but they could not believe that to-day's hunger could be satisfied. Discontent has a slippery memory. They wish to get back to the flesh-pots, of which the savour is in their nostrils, and they have forgotten the bitter sauce of affliction. When they were in Egypt, they shrieked about their oppression, and were ready to give up anything for liberty; when they have got it, they are ready to put their necks in the yoke again, if only they can have their stomachs filled. Men do not know how happy they are till they cease to be so. Our present miseries and our past blessings are the themes on which unbelief harps. Let him that is without similar sin cast the first stone at these grumbling Israelites. Without following closely the text of the narrative, we may throw together the lessons of the manna.

I. Observe God's purpose in the gift, as distinctly expressed in the promise of it.

'That I may prove them, whether they will walk in My law or no.' How did the manna become a test of this? By means of the law prescribed for gathering it. There was to be a given quantity daily, and twice as much on the sixth day. If a man trusted God for to-morrow, he would be content to stop collecting when he had filled his omer, tempting as the easily gathered abundance would be. Greed and unbelief would masquerade then as now, under the guise of prudent foresight. The old Egyptian parallels to 'make hay while

the sun shines,' and suchlike wise sayings of the philosophy of distrust, would be solemnly spoken, and listened to as pearls of wisdom. When experience had taught that, however much a man gathered, he had no more than his omer full, after all,—and is not that true yet?—then the next temptation would be to practise economy, and have something over for to-morrow. Only he who absolutely trusted God to provide for him would eat up his portion, and lie down at night with a quiet heart, knowing that He who had fed him would feed. When experience had taught that what was saved rotted, then laziness would come in and say, 'What is the use of gathering twice as much on the sixth day? Don't we know that it will not keep?' So the whole of the gift was a continual training of, and therefore a continual test for, faith. God willed to let His gifts come in this hand-to-mouth fashion, though He could have provided at once what would have obviously lasted them all their wilderness life, in order that they might be habituated to cling to Him, and that their daily bread might be doubly for their nourishment, feeding their bodies and strengthening that faith which, to them as to us, is the condition of all blessedness. God lets our blessings, too, trickle to us drop by drop, instead of pouring them in a flood all at once upon us, for the same reason. He does so, not because of any good to Him from our faith, except that the Infinite love loves infinitely to be loved; but for our sakes, that we may taste the peace and strength of continual dependence, and the joy of continual receiving. He could give us the principal down; but He prefers to pay us the interest, as we need it.

Christianity does not absolutely forbid laying up money or other resources for future wants. But the

love of accumulating, which is so strong in many professing Christians, and the habit of amassing beyond all reasonable future wants, is surely scarcely permitted to those who profess to believe that incarnate wisdom forbade taking anxious care for the morrow, and sent its disciples to lilies and birds to learn the happy immunities of faith. We too get our daily mercies to prove us. The letter of the law for the manna is not applicable to us who gain our bread by God's blessing on our labour. But the spirit is, and the members of great commercial nations have surely little need to be reminded that still the portion put away is apt to breed worms. How often it vanishes, or, if it lasts, tortures its owner, who has more trouble keeping it than he had in getting it; or fatally corrupts his own character, or ruins his children! All God's gifts are tests, which—thanks be to Him—is the same as to say that they are means of increasing faith, and so adding to joy.

II. The manna was further a disclosure of the depth of patient long-suffering in God.

Very strikingly the 'murmurings' of the children of Israel are four times referred to in this context, and on each occasion are stated as the reason for the gift of the manna. It was God's answer to the peevish complaints of greedy appetites. When they were summoned to come near to the Lord, with the ominous warning that 'He hath heard your murmurings,' no doubt many a heart began to quake; and when the Glory flashed from the Shechinah cloud, it would burn lurid to their trembling consciences. But the message which comes from it is sweet in its gentleness, as it promises the manna because they have murmured, and in order that they may know the Lord. A mother soothes her crying infant by feeding it from her own



bosom. God does not take the rod to His whimpering children, but rather tries to win them by patience, and to shame their unbelief by His swift and over-abundant answers to their complaints. When He must, He punishes; but when He can, He complies. Faith is the condition of our receiving His highest gifts; but even unbelief touches His heart with pity, and what He can give to it, He does, if it may be melted into trust. The farther men stray from Him, the more tender and penetrating His recalling voice. We multiply transgressions, He multiplies mercies.

III. The manna was a revelation in miraculous and transient form of an eternal truth.

The God who sent it sends daily bread. The words which Christ quoted in His wilderness hunger are the explanation of its meaning as a witness to this truth: 'Man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.' To a Christian, the divine power is present and operative in all natural processes as really as in those which we call miraculous. God is separable from the universe, but the universe is not separable from God. If it were separated, it would cease. So far as the reality of the divine operation is concerned, it matters not whether He works in the established fashion, through material things, or whether His will acts directly. The chain which binds a phenomenon to the divine will may be long or short; the intervening links may be many, or they may be abolished, and the divine cause and the visible effect may touch without anything between. But in either case the power is of God. Bread made out of flour grown on the other side of the world, and fashioned by the baker, and bought by the fruits of my industry, is as truly the gift of God as was the manna.

For once, He showed these men His hand at work, that we all might know that it was at work, when hidden. The lesson of the 'angel's food' eaten in the wilderness is that men are fed by the power of God's expressed and active will,—for that is the meaning of 'the word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God,'—in whatever fashion they get their food. The gift of it is from Him; its power to nourish is from Him. It is as true to-day as ever it was: 'Thou openest Thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.' The manna ceased when the people came near cornfields and settled homes. Miracles end when means are possible. But the God of the miracle is the God of the means.

Commentators make much of what is supposed to be a natural substratum for the manna, in a certain vegetable product, found in small quantities in parts of the Arabian peninsula. No doubt, we are to recognise in the plagues of Egypt, and in the dividing of the Red Sea, the extraordinary action of ordinary causes; and there is no objection in principle to doing so here. But that an exudation from the bark of a shrub, which has no nutritive properties at all, is found only in one or two places in Arabia, and that only at certain seasons and in infinitesimal quantity, seems a singularly thin 'substratum' on which to build up the feeding of two millions of people, more or less exclusively and continuously for forty years, by means of a substance which has nothing to do with tamarisk-trees, and is like the natural product in nothing but sweetness and name. Whether we admit connection between the two, or not, the miraculous character of the manna of the Israelites is unaffected. It was miraculous in its origin—'rained from heaven,' in its quantity, in its observance of times and seasons, in its putrefaction

and preservation,—as rotting when kept for greed, and remaining sweet when preserved for the Sabbath. It came straight from the creative will of God, and whether its name means 'What is it?' or 'It is a gift,' the designation is equally true and appropriate, pointing, in the one case, to the mystery of its nature; in the other, to the love of the Giver, and in both referring it directly to the hand of God.

#### IV. The manna was typical of Christ.

Our Lord Himself has laid His hand upon it, and claimed it as a faint foreshadowing of what He is. The Jews, not satisfied with the miracle of the loaves, demand from Him a greater sign, as the condition of what they are pleased to call 'belief'—which is nothing but accepting the testimony of sense. They quote Moses as giving the manna, and imply that Messiah is expected to repeat the miracle. Christ accepts the challenge, and goes on to claim that He not only gives, but Himself is, for all men's souls, all and more than all which the manna had been to the bodies of that dead generation. Like it, He came—but in how much more profound a sense!—from heaven. Like it, He was food. But unlike it, He could still for ever the craving of the else famishing soul; unlike it, He not only nourished a bodily life already possessed, but communicated a spiritual life which never dies; and, unlike it, He was meant to be the food of the whole world. His teaching passed beyond the symbolism of the manna, when He not only declared Himself to be the 'true bread from heaven which gives life to the world,' but opened a glimpse into the solemn mystery of His atoning death by the startling and apparently repulsive paradox that 'His flesh was food indeed and His blood drink indeed.' The manna does not typically teach Christ's atonement,

but it does set Him forth as the true sustenance and life-giver, sweet as honey to the soul, sent from heaven for us each, but needing to be made ours by the act of our faith. An Israelite would have starved, though the manna lay all round the camp, if he did not go forth and secure his portion; and he might no less have starved, if he did not eat what Heaven had sent. 'Crede et manducasti,' 'Believe, and thou hast eaten,'—as St. Augustine says. The personal appropriating act of faith is essential to our having Christ for the food of our souls. The bread that nourishes our bodies is assimilated to their substance, and so becomes sustenance. This bread of God, entering into our souls by faith, transforms them into its substance, and so gives and feeds an immortal life. The manna was for a generation; this bread is 'the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.' That was for a handful of men; this is for the world. Nor is the prophetic value of the manna exhausted when we recognise its witness to Christ. The food of the wilderness is the food of the city. The bread that is laid on the table, 'spread in the presence of the enemy,' is the bread that makes the feast in the king's palace. The Christ who feeds the pilgrim soldiers is the Christ on whom the conquerors banquet. 'To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna.'

### JEHOVAH NISSI

'And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovah Nissi [that is, the Lord is my Banner].—EXODUS xvii. 15.

WE are all familiar with that picturesque incident of the conflict between Israel and Amalek, which ended

in victory and the erection of this memorial trophy. Moses, as you remember, went up on the mount whilst Joshua and the men of war fought in the plain. But I question whether we usually attach the right meaning to the symbolism of this event. We ordinarily, I suppose, think of Moses as interceding on the mountain with God. But there is no word about prayer in the story, and the attitude of Moses is contrary to the idea that his occupation was intercession. He sat there, with the rod of God in his hand, and the rod of God was the symbol and the vehicle of divine power. When he lifted the rod Amalek fled before Israel; when the rod dropped Israel fled before Amalek. That is to say, the uplifted hand was not the hand of intercession, but the hand which communicated power and victory. And so, when the conflict is over, Moses builds this memorial of thanksgiving to God, and piles together these great stones—which, perhaps, still stand in some of the unexplored valleys of that weird desert land—to teach Israel the laws of conflict and the conditions of victory. These laws and conditions are implied in the name which he gave to the altar that he built—Jehovah Nissi, ‘the Lord is my Banner.’

Now, then, what do these stones, with their significant name, teach us, as they taught the ancient Israelites? Let me throw these lessons into three brief exhortations.

I. First, realise for whose cause you fight.

The Banner was the symbol of the cause for which an army fought, or the cognizance of the king or commander whom it followed. So Moses, by that name given to the altar, would impress upon the minds of the cowardly mob that he had brought out of Egypt—and who now had looked into an enemy’s eyes for

the first time—the elevating and bracing thought that they were God's soldiers, and that the warfare which they waged was not for themselves, nor for the conquest of the country for their own sake, nor for mere outward liberty, but that they were fighting that the will of God might prevail, and that He might be the King now of one land—a mere corner of the earth—and thereby might come to be King of all the earth. That rude altar said to Israel: 'Remember, when you go into the battle, that the battle is the Lord's; and that the standard under which you war is the God for whose cause you contend—none else and none less than Jehovah Himself. You are consecrated soldiers, set apart to fight for God.'

Such is the destination of all Christians. They have a battle to fight, of which they do not think loftily enough, unless they clearly and constantly recognise that they are fighting on God's side.

I need not dwell upon the particulars of this conflict, or run into details of the way in which it is to be waged. Only let us remember that the first field upon which we have to fight for God we carry about within ourselves; and that there will be no victories for us over other enemies until we have, first of all, subdued the foes that are within. And then let us remember that the absorbing importance of inward conflict absolves no Christian man from the duty of strenuously contending for all things that are 'lovely and of good report,' and from waging war against every form of sorrow and sin which his influence can touch. There is no surer way of securing victory in the warfare within and conquering self than to throw myself into the service of others, and lose myself in their sorrows and needs. There is no possibility of my taking my

share in the merciful warfare against sin and sorrow, the tyrants that oppress my fellows, unless I conquer myself. These two fields of the Christian warfare are not two in the sense of being separable from one another, but they are two in the sense of being the inside and the outside of the same fabric. The warfare is one, though the fields are two.

Let us remember, on the other hand, that whilst it is our simple bounden duty, as Christian men and women, to reckon ourselves as anointed and called for the purpose of warring against sin and sorrow, wherever we can assail them, there is nothing more dangerous, and few things more common, than the hasty identification of fighting for some whim, or prejudice, or narrow view, or partial conception of our own, with contending for the establishment of the will of God. How many wicked things have been done in this world for God's glory! How many obstinate men, who were really only forcing their own opinions down people's throats because they were theirs, have fancied themselves to be pure-minded warriors for God! How easy it has been, in all generations, to make the sign of the Cross over what had none of the spirit of the Cross in it; and to say, 'The cause is God's, and therefore I war for it'; when the reality was, 'The cause is mine, and therefore I take it for granted that it is God's.'

Let us beware of the 'wolf in sheep's clothing,' the pretence of sanctity which is only selfishness with a mask on. And, above all, let us beware of the uncharitableness and narrowness of view, the vehemence of temper, the fighting for our own hands, the enforcing of our own notions and whims and peculiarities, which have often done duty as being true Christian service for the Master's sake. We are God's host, but we are

not to suppose that every notion that we take into our heads, and for which we may contend, is part of the cause of God.

And then remember what sort of men the soldiers in such an army ought to be. 'Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord.' These bearers may either be regarded as a solemn procession of priests carrying the sacrificial vessels; or, as is more probable from the context of the original, as the armour-bearers of the great King. They must be pure who bear His weapons, for these are His righteous love, His loving purity. If our camp is the camp of the Lord, no violence should be there. What sanctity, what purity, what patience, what long-suffering, what self-denial, and what enthusiastic confidence of victory there should be in those who can say, 'We are the Lord's host, Jehovah is our Banner!' He always wins who sides with God. And he only worthily takes his place in the ranks of the sacramental host of the Most High who goes into the warfare knowing that, because He is God's soldier, he will come out of it, bringing his victorious shield with him, and ready for the laurels to be twined round his undinted helmet. That is the first of the thoughts, then, that are here.

II. The second of the exhortations which come from the altar and its name is, Remember whose commands you follow.

The banner in ancient warfare, even more than in modern, moved in front of the host, and determined the movements of the army. And so, by the stones that he piled and the name which he gave them, Moses taught Israel and us that they and we are under the command of God, and that it is the movements of His staff that are to be followed. Absolute obedience is the



first duty of the Christian soldier, and absolute obedience means the entire suppression of my own will, the holding of it in equilibrium until He puts His finger on the side that He desires to dip and lets the other rise. They only understand their place as Christ's servants and soldiers who have learned to hush their own will until they know their Captain's. In order to be blessed, to be strong, to be victorious, the indispensable condition is that our inmost desire shall be, 'Not my will, but Thine be done.'

Sometimes, and often, there will be perplexities in our daily lives, and conflicts very hard to unravel. We shall often be brought to a point where we cannot see which way the Banner is leading us. What then? 'It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait' for the salvation and for the guidance of his God. And we shall generally find that it is when we are looking too far ahead that we do not get guidance. You will not get guidance to-day for this day next week. When this day next week comes, it will bring its own enlightenment with it.

'Lead, kindly Light, . . .

. . . One step enough for me.'

Let us take short views both of duty and of hope, and we shall not so often have to complain that we are left without knowing what the Commander's orders are. Sometimes we are so left, and that is a lesson in patience, and is generally God's way of telling us that it is not His will that we should do anything at all just yet. Sometimes we are so left in order that we may put our hand out through the darkness, and hold on by Him, and say, 'I know not what to do, but mine eyes are towards Thee.'

And be sure of this, brethren, that He will not desert His own promise, and that they who in their inmost hearts can say, 'The Lord is my Banner,' will never have to complain that He led them into a 'pathless wilderness where there was no way.' It is sometimes a very narrow track, it is often a very rough one, it is sometimes a dreadfully solitary one; but He always goes before us, and they who hold His hand will not hold it in vain. 'The Lord is my Banner'; obey His orders and do not take anybody else's; nor, above all, the suggestions of that impatient, talkative heart of yours, instead of His commandments.

III. Lastly, the third lesson that these grey stones preach to us is, Recognise by whose power you conquer.

The banner, I suppose, to us English people, suggests a false idea. It suggests the notion of a flag, or some bit of flexible drapery which fluttered and flapped in the wind; but the banner of old-world armies was a rigid pole, with some solid ornament of bright metal on the top, so as to catch the light. The banner-staff spoken of in the text links itself with the preceding incident. I said that Moses stood on the mountain-top with the rod in his hand. Now that rod was exactly a miniature banner, and when he lifted it, victory came to Israel; and when it fell, victory deserted their arms. So by the altar's name he would say, Do not suppose that it was Moses that won the battle, nor that it was the rod that Moses carried in his hand that brought you strength. The true Victor was Jehovah, and it was He who was Moses' Banner. It was by Him that the lifted rod brought victory; as for Moses, he had nothing to do with it; and the people had to look higher than the hill-top where he sat.

This thought puts stress on the first word of the phrase

instead of on the last, as in my previous remarks. 'The Lord is my Banner,'—no Moses, no outward symbol, no man or thing, but only He Himself. Therefore, in all our duties, and in all our difficulties, and in all our conflicts, and for all our conquests, we are to look away from creatures, self, externals, and to look only to God. We are all too apt to trust in rods instead of in Him, in Moses instead of in Moses' Lord.

We are all too apt to trust in externals, in organisations, sacraments, services, committees, outside aids of all sorts, as our means for doing God's work, and bringing power to us and blessing to the world. Let us get away from them all, dig deeper down than any of these, be sure that these are but surface reservoirs, but that the fountain which fills them with any refreshing liquid which they may bear lies in God Himself. Why should we trouble ourselves about reservoirs when we can go to the Fountain? Why should we put such reliance on churches and services and preaching and sermons and schemes and institutions and organisations when we have the divine Lord Himself for our strength? 'Jehovah is my Banner,' and Moses' rod is only a symbol. At most it is like a lightning-conductor, but it is not the lightning. The lightning will come without the rod, if our eyes are to the heaven, for the true power that brings God down to men is that forsaking of externals and waiting upon Him which He never refuses to answer.

In like manner we are too apt to put far too much confidence in human teachers and human helpers of various kinds. And when God takes them away we say to ourselves that there is a gap that can never be filled. Ay! but the great sea can come in and fill

any gap, and make the deepest and the driest of the excavations in the desert to abound in sweet water.

So let us turn away from everything external, gather in our souls and fix our hopes on Him; let us recognise the imperative duty of the Christian warfare which is laid upon us; let us docilely submit ourselves to His sweet commands, and trust in His sufficient and punctual guidance, and not expect from any outward sources that which no outward sources can ever give, but which He Himself will give—strength to our fingers to fight, and weapons for the warfare, and covering for our heads in the day of battle.

And then, when our lives are done, may the only inscription on the stone that covers us be ‘Jehovah Nissi: the Lord is my banner’! The trophy that commemorates the Christian’s victory should bear no name but His by whose grace we are more than conquerors. ‘Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.’

### GERSHOM AND ELIEZER

‘The name of the one [of Moses’ sons] was Gershom . . . and the name of the other was Eliezer. . . .’—EXODUS xviii. 3, 4.

IN old times parents often used to give expression to their hopes or their emotions in the names of their children. Very clearly that was the case in Moses’ naming of his two sons, who seem to have been the whole of his family. The significance of each name is appended to it in the text. The explanation of the first is, ‘For he said, I have been an alien in a strange land’; and that of the second, ‘For the God of my

fathers, said he, was mine help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh.' These two names give us a pathetic glimpse of the feelings with which Moses began his exile, and of the better thoughts into which these gradually cleared. The first child's name expresses his father's discontent, and suggests the bitter contrast between Sinai and Egypt; the court and the sheepfold; the gloomy, verdureless, gaunt peaks of Sinai, blazing in the fierce sunshine, and the cool, luscious vegetation of Goshen, the land for cattle. The exile felt himself all out of joint with his surroundings, and so he called the little child that came to him 'Gershom,' which, according to one explanation, means 'banishment,' and, according to another (a kind of punning etymology), means 'a stranger here'; in the other case expressing the same sense of homelessness and want of harmony with his surroundings. But as the years went on, Moses began to acclimatise himself, and to become more reconciled to his position and to see things more as they really were. So, when the second child is born, all his murmuring has been hushed, and he looks beyond circumstances, and lays his hand upon God. 'And the name of the second was Eliezer, for, he said, the God of my fathers was my help.'

Now, there are the two main streams of thought that filled these forty years; and it was worth while to put Moses into the desert for all that time, and to break off the purposes and hopes of his life sharp and short, and to condemn him to comparative idleness, or work that was all unfitted to bring out his special powers, for that huge scantling out of his life, one-third of the whole of it, in order that there might be burnt into him, not either of these two thoughts separately, but the two of them in their blessed conjunction; 'I am a

stranger here'; 'God is my Help.' And so these are the thoughts which, in like juxtaposition, ought to be ours; and in higher fashion with regard to the former of them than was experienced by Moses. Let me say a word or two about each of these two things. Let us think of the strangers, and of the divine helper that is with the strangers.

I. 'A stranger here.'

Now, that is true, in the deepest sense, about all men; for the one thing that makes the difference between the man and the beast is that the beast is perfectly at home in his surroundings, and gets all that he needs out of them, and finds in them a field for all that he can do, and is fully developed to the very highest point of his capacity by what people nowadays call the 'environment' in which he is put. But the very opposite is the case in regard to us men. 'Foxes have holes,' and they are quite comfortable there; 'and the birds of the air have roosting-places,' and tuck their heads under their wings and go to sleep without a care and without a consciousness. 'But the Son of man,' the ideal Humanity as well as the realised ideal in the person of Jesus Christ, 'hath not where to lay His head.' No; because He is so 'much better than they.' Their immunity from care is not a prerogative—it is an inferiority. We are plunged into the midst of a scene of things which obviously does not match our capacities. There is a great deal more in every man than can ever find a field of expression, of work, or of satisfaction in anything beneath the stars. And no man that understands, even superficially, his own character, his own requirements, can fail to feel in his sane and quiet moments, when the rush of temptation and the illusions of this fleeting life have lost their

grip upon him : 'This is not the place that can bring out all that is in me, or that can yield me all that I desire.' Our capacities transcend the present, and the experiences of the present are all unintelligible, unless the true end of every human life is not here at all, but in another region, for which these experiences are fitting us.

But, then, the temptations of life, the strong appeals of flesh and sense, the duties which in their proper place are lofty and elevating and refining, and put out of their place, are contemptible and degrading, all come in to make it hard for any of us to keep clearly before us what our consciousness tells us when it is strongly appealed to, that we are strangers and sojourners here and that this is not 'our rest, because it is polluted.' Therefore it comes to be the great glory and blessedness of the Christian Revelation that it obviously shifts the centre for us, and makes that future, and not this present, the aim for which, and in the pursuit of which, we are to live. So, Christian people, in a far higher sense than Moses, who only felt himself 'a stranger there,' because he did not like Midian as well as Egypt, have to say, 'We are strangers here'; and the very aim, in one aspect, of our Christian discipline of ourselves is that we shall keep vivid, in the face of all the temptations to forget it, this consciousness of being away from our true home.

One means of doing that is to think rather oftener than the most of us do, about our true home. You have heard, I dare say, of half-reclaimed gipsies, who for a while have been coaxed out of the free life of the woods and the moors, and have gone into settled homes. After a while there has come over them a rush of feeling, a remembrance of how blessed it used

to be out in the open and away from the squalor and filth where men 'sit and hear each other groan,' and they have flung off 'as if they were fetters' the trappings of 'civilisation,' and gone back to liberty. That is what we ought to do—not going back from the higher to the lower, but smitten with what the Germans call the *heimweh*, the home-sickness, that makes us feel that we must get clearer sight of that land to which we truly belong.

Do you think about it, do you feel that where Jesus Christ is, is your home? I have no doubt that most of you have, or have had, dear ones here on earth about whom you could say that, 'Where my husband, my wife is; where my beloved is, or my children are, that is my home, wherever my abode may be.' Are you, Christian people, saying the same thing about heaven and Jesus Christ? Do you feel that you are strangers here, not only because you, reflecting upon your character and capacities and on human life, see that all these require another life for their explanation and development, but because your hearts are knit to Him, and 'where your treasure is there your heart is also'; and where your heart is there you are? We go home when we come into communion with Jesus Christ. Do you ever, in the course of the rush of your daily work, think about the calm city beyond the sea, and about its King, and that you belong to it? 'Our citizenship is in heaven,' and here we are strangers.

II. Now let me say a word about the other child's name.

'God is Helper.' We do not know what interval of time elapsed between the birth of these two children. There are some indications that the second of them was in years very much the junior. Perhaps the



transition from the mood represented in the one name to that represented in the other, was a long and slow process. But be that as it may, note the connection between these two names. You can never say 'We are strangers here' without feeling a little prick of pain, unless you say too 'God is my Helper.' There is a beautiful variation of the former word which will occur to many of you, I have no doubt, in one of the old psalms: 'I am a stranger *with Thee*, and a sojourner, as were all my fathers.' There is the secret that takes away all the mourning, all the possible discomfort and pain, out of the thought: 'Here we have no continuing city,' and makes it all blessed. It does not matter whether we are in a foreign land or no, if we have that Companion with us. His presence will make blessedness in Midian, or in Thebes. It does not matter whether it is Goshen or the wilderness, if the Lord is by our side. So sweetness is breathed into the thought, and bitterness is sucked out of it, when the name of the second child is braided into the name of the first; and we can contemplate quietly all else of tragic and limiting and sad that is involved in the thought that we are sojourners and pilgrims, when we say 'Yes! we are; but the Lord is my Helper.'

Then, on the other hand, we shall never say and feel 'the Lord is my Helper,' as we ought to do, until we have got deep in our hearts, and settled in our consciousness, the other conviction that we are strangers here. It is only when we realise that there is no other permanence for us that we put out our hands and grasp at the Eternal, in order not to be swept away upon the dark waves of the rushing stream of Time. It is only when all other props are stricken from us that we rest our whole weight upon that one strong

central pillar, which can never be moved. Learn that God helps, for that makes it possible to say 'I am a stranger,' and not to weep. Learn that you are strangers, for that stimulates to take God for our help. Just as when the floods are out, men are driven to the highest ground to save their lives; so when the billows of the waters of time are seen to be rolling over all creatural things, we take our flight to the Rock of Ages. Put the two together, and they fit one another and strengthen us.

This second conviction was the illuminating light upon a perplexed and problematic past. Moses, when he fled from Egypt, thought that his life's work was rent in twain. He had believed that his brethren would have seen that it was God's purpose to use him as the deliverer. For the sake of being such, he had surrendered the court and its delights. But on his young ambition and innocent enthusiasm there came this *douche* of cold water, which lasted for forty years, and sent him away into the wilderness, to be a shepherd under an Arab sheikh, with nothing to look forward to. At first he said, 'This is not what I was meant for; I am out of my element here.' But before the forty years were over he said, 'The God of my father was my help, and He delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh.' What had looked a disaster turned out to be a deliverance, a manifestation of divine help, and not a hindrance. He had got far enough away from that past to look at it sanely, that is to say gratefully. So we, when we get far enough away from our sorrows, can look back at them, sometimes even here on earth, and say, 'The mercy of the Lord compassed me about.' Here is the key that unlocks all the perplexities of providence, 'The Lord was my Helper.'

And that conviction will steady and uphold a man in a present, however dark. It was no small exercise of his faith and patience that the great lawgiver should for so many years have such unworthy work to do as he had in Midian. But even then he gathered into his heart this confidence, and brought summer about him into the mid-winter of his life, and light into the midst of darkness; 'for he said'—even then, when there was no work for him to do that seemed much to need a divine help—'the Lord is my Helper.'

And so, however dark may be our present moment, and however obscure or repulsive our own tasks, let us fall back upon that old word, 'Thou hast been my Help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.'

When Moses named his boy, his gratitude was allied with faith in favours to come; and when he said 'was,' he meant also 'will be.' And he was right. He dreamt very little of what was coming, but this confidence that was expressed in his second child's name was warranted by that great future that lay before him, though he did not know it. When the pinch came his confidence faltered. It was easy to say 'The Lord is my Helper,' when there was nothing very special for which God's help was needed, and nothing harder to do than to look after a few sheep in the wilderness. But when God said to him, 'Go and stand before Pharaoh,' Moses for the moment forgot all about God's being his helper, and was full of all manner of cowardly excuses, which, like the excuses of a great many more of us for not doing our plain duty, took the shape of a very engaging modesty and diffidence as to his capacities. But God said to him, 'Surely I will be with thee.' He gave him back 'Eliezer,' in a little different

form. 'You used to say that I was your helper. What has become of your faith now? Has it all evaporated when the trial comes? Surely I will be with thee.' If we will set ourselves to our tasks, not doubting God's help, we shall have occasion in the event to be sure that God did help us.

So, brethren, let us cherish these two thoughts, and never keep them apart, and God will be, as our good old hymn has it—

'Our help while troubles last,  
And our eternal home.'

### THE IDEAL STATESMAN<sup>1</sup>

'Thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them.'—EXODUS xviii. 21.

You will have anticipated my purpose in selecting this text. I should be doing violence to your feelings and mine if I made no reference to the event which has united the Empire and the world in one sentiment. The great tree has fallen, and the crash has for the moment silenced all the sounds of the forest. Wars abroad and controversies at home are hushed. All men, of all schools of opinion, creeds, and parties, see now, in the calm face of the dead, 'the likeness to the great of old'; and it says something, with all our faults, for the soundness of the heart of English opinion, that all sorts and conditions of men have brought their sad wreaths to lay them on that coffin.

But, whilst much has been said, far more eloquently and authoritatively than I can say it, about the many aspects of that many-sided life, surely it becomes us, as Christian people, to look at it from the distinctively

<sup>1</sup> Preached on occasion of Mr. Gladstone's death.

Christian point of view, and to gather some of the lessons which, so regarded, it teaches us.

My text is part of the sagacious advice which Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, gave him about the sort of men that he should pick out to be his lieutenants in civic government. Its old-fashioned, simple phraseology may hide from some of us the elevation and comprehensiveness of the ideal that it sets forth. But it is a grand ideal; and amongst the great names of Englishmen who have guided the destinies of this land, none have approached more nearly to it than he whose death has taken away the most striking personality from our public life.

So let me ask you to look with me, first, at the ideal of a politician that is set forth here.

The free life of the desert, far away from the oppressions of surrounding military despotisms, that remarkable and antique constitution of the clan, with all its beautiful loyalty, had given this Arab sheikh a far loftier conception of what a ruler of men was than he could have found exemplified at Pharaoh's court; or than, alas! has been common in many so-called Christian countries. The field upon which he intended that these great qualities should be exercised was a very limited one, to manage the little affairs of a handful of fugitives in the desert. But the scale on which we work has nothing to do with the principles by which we work, and the laws of perspective and colouring are the same, whether you paint the minutest miniature or a gigantic fresco. So what was needed for managing the little concerns of Moses' wanderers in the wilderness is the ideal of what is needed for the men who direct the public affairs of world-wide empires.

Let me run over the details. They must be 'able men,' or, as the original has it, 'men of strength.' There is the intellectual basis, and especially the basis of firm, brave, strongly-set will which will grasp convictions, and, whatever comes, will follow them to their conclusions. The statesman is not one that puts his ear down to the ground to hear the tramp of some advancing host, and then makes up his mind to follow in their paths; he is not sensitive to the varying winds of public opinion, nor does he trim his sails to suit them, but he comes to his convictions by first-hand approach to, and meditation on, the great principles that are to guide, and then holds to them with a strength that nothing can weaken, and a courage that nothing can daunt. 'Men of strength' is what democracies like ours do most need in their leaders; a 'strong man, in a blatant land,' who knows his own mind, and is faithful to it for ever. That is a great demand.

'Such as fear God'—there is the secret of strength, not merely in reference to the intellectual powers which are not dependent for their origin, though they may be for the health and vigour of their work, upon any religious sentiment, but in regard to all true power. He that would govern others must first be lord of himself, and he only is lord of himself who is consciously and habitually the servant of God. So that whatever natural endowment we start with, it must be heightened, purified, deepened, enlarged, by the presence in our lives of a deep and vital religious conviction. That is true about all men, leaders and led, large and small. That is the bottom-heat in the greenhouse, as it were, that will make riper and sweeter all the fruits which are the natural result of natural capacities. That is the amulet and the charm

which will keep a man from the temptations incident to his position and the weaknesses incident to his character. The fear of God underlies the noblest lives. That is not to-day's theory. We are familiar with the fact, and familiar with the doctrine formulated out of it, that there may be men of strong and noble lives and great leaders in many a department of human activity without any reference to the Unseen. Yes, there may be, but they are all fragments, and the complete man comes only when the fear of the Lord is guide, leader, impulse, polestar, regulator, corrector, and inspirer of all that he is and all that he does.

'Men of truth'—that, of course, glances at the crooked ways which belong not only to Eastern statesmanship, but it does more than that. He that is to lead men must himself be led by an eager haste to follow after, and to apprehend, the very truth of things. And there must be in him clear transparent willingness to render his utmost allegiance, at any sacrifice, to the dawning convictions that may grow upon him. It is only fools that do not change. Freshness of enthusiasm, and fidelity to new convictions opening upon a man, to the end of his life, are not the least important of the requirements in him who would persuade and guide individuals or a nation.

'Hating covetousness'; or, as it might be rendered, 'unjust gain.' That reference to the 'oiling of the palms' of Eastern judges may be taken in a loftier signification. If a man is to stand forth as the leader of a people, he must be clear, as old Samuel said that he was, from all suspicion of having been following out his career for any form of personal advantage. 'Clean hands,' and that not only from the vulgar filth of wealth, but from the more subtle advantages which

may accrue from a lofty position, are demanded of the leader of men.

Such is the ideal. The requirements are stern and high, and they exclude the vermin that infest 'politics,' as they are called, and cause them to stink in many nostrils. The self-seeking schemer, the one-eyed partisan, the cynic who disbelieves in ideals of any sort, the charlatan who assumes virtues that he does not possess, and mouths noble sentiments that go no deeper than his teeth, are all shut out by them. The doctrine that a man may do in his public capacity things which would be disgraceful in private life, and yet retain his personal honour untarnished, is blown to atoms by this ideal. It is much to be regretted, and in some senses to be censured, that so many of our wisest, best, and most influential men stand apart from public life. Much of that is due to personal bias, much more of it is due to the pressure of more congenial duties, and not a little of it is due to the disregard of Jethro's ideal, and to the degradation of public life which has ensued thereby. But there have been great men in our history whose lives have helped to lift up the ideal of a statesman, who have made such a sketch as Jethro outlined, though they may not have used his words, their polestar; and amongst the highest of these has been the man whose loss we to-day lament.

Let me try to vindicate that expression of opinion in a word or two. I cannot hope to vie in literary grace, or in completeness, with the eulogies that have been abundantly poured out; and I should not have thought it right to divert this hour of worship from its ordinary themes, if I had had no more to say than has been far better said a thousand times in these last days. But I cannot help noticing that, though there has been a



consensus of admiration of, and a practically unanimous pointing to, character as after all the secret of the spell which Mr. Gladstone has exercised for two generations, there has not been, as it seems to me, equal and due prominence given to what was, and what he himself would have said was, the real root of his character and the productive cause of his achievements.

And so I venture now to say a word or two about the religion of the man that to his own consciousness underlay all the rest of him. It is not for me to speak, and there is no need to speak, about the marvellous natural endowments and the equally marvellous, many-sided equipment of attainment which enriched the rich, natural soil. Intermeddling as he did with all knowledge, he must necessarily have been but an amateur in many of the subjects into which he rushed with such generous eagerness. But none the less is the example of all but omnivorous acquisitiveness of everything that was to be known, a protest, very needful in these days, against the possible evils of an excessive specialising which the very progress of knowledge in all departments seems to make inevitable. I do not need to speak, either, of the flow, and sometimes the torrent, of eloquence ever at his command, nor of the lithe and sinewy force of his extraordinarily nimble, as well as massive, mind; nor need I say more than one word about the remarkable combination of qualities so generally held and seen to be incompatible, which put into one personality a genius for dry arithmetical figures and a genius for enthusiasm and sympathy with all the oppressed. All these things have been said far better than I can say them, and I do not repeat them.

But I desire to hammer this one conviction into your

hearts and my own, that the inmost secret of that noble life, of all that wealth of capacity, all that load of learning, which he bore lightly like a flower, was the fact that the man was, to the very depths of his nature, a devout Christian. He would have been as capable, as eloquent, and all the rest of it, if he had been an unbeliever. But he would never have been nor done what he was and did, and he would never have left the dint of an impressive and lofty personality upon a whole nation and a world, if beneath the intellect there had not been character, and beneath character Christianity.

He was far removed, in ecclesiastical connections, from us Nonconformists, and he held opinions in regard to some very important ecclesiastical questions which cut straight across some of our deepest convictions. We never had to look for much favour from his hands, because his intellectual atmosphere removed him far from sympathy with many of the truths which are dearest to the members of the Free Evangelical Churches. But none the less we recognise in him a brother in Jesus Christ, and rejoice that there, on the high places of a careless and sceptical generation, there stood a Christian man.

In this connection I cannot but, though I have no right to do so, express how profoundly thankful I, for one, was to the present Prime Minister of England that in his brief eulogium on, I was going to say, his great rival, he ended all by the emphatic declaration that Mr. Gladstone was, first and foremost, a great Christian man. Yes; and there was the secret, as I have already said, not of his merely political eminence, but of the universal reverence which a nation expresses to-day. All detraction is silenced, and all calumnies

have dropped away, as filth from the white wings of a swan as it soars, and with one voice the Empire and the world confess that he was a great and a good man.

I need not dwell in detail on the thoughts of how, by reason of this deep underlying fear of God, the other qualifications which are sketched in our ideal found their realisation in him; how those who, all through his career, smiled most at the successive enthusiasms which monopolised his mind, and sometimes at the contrasts between these, are now ready to admit that, whether the enthusiasms were right or wrong, there is something noble in the spectacle of a man ever keeping his mind, even when its windows were beginning to be dimmed by the frosts of age, open to the beams of new truth. And the greatest, as some people think, of his political blunders, as we are beginning, all of us, to recognise, now that party strife is hushed, was the direct consequence of that ever fresh and youthful enthusiasm for new thoughts and new lines of action. Innovators aged eighty are not too numerous.

Nor need I say more than one word about the other part of the ideal, 'hating covetousness.' The giver of peerages by the bushel died a commoner. The man that had everything at his command made no money, nor anything else, out of his long years of office, except the satisfaction of having been permitted to render what he believed to be the highest of service to the nation that he loved so well. Like our whilom neighbour, the other great commoner, John Bright, he lived among his own people; and like Samuel, of whom I have already spoken, he could stretch out his old hands and say, 'They are clean.' One scarcely feels as if, to such a life, a State funeral in Westminster Abbey was congruous. One had rather have seen him laid among

the humble villagers who were his friends and companions, and in the quiet churchyard which his steps had so often traversed. But at all events the ideal was realised, and we all know what it was.

Might I say one word more? As this great figure passes out of men's sight to nobler work, be sure, on widened horizons corresponding to his tutored and exercised powers, does he leave no lessons behind for us? He leaves one very plain, homely one, and that is, 'Work while it is called to-day.' No opulence of endowment tempted this man to indolence, and no poverty of endowment will excuse us for sloth. Work is the law of our lives; and the more highly we are gifted, the more are we bound to serve.

He leaves us another lesson. Follow convictions as they open before you, and never think that you have done growing, or have reached your final stage.

He leaves another lesson. Do not suppose that the Gospel of Jesus Christ cannot satisfy the keenest intellect, nor dominate the strongest will. It has come to be a mark of narrowness and fossilhood to be a devout believer in Christ and His Cross. Some of you young men make an easy reputation for cleverness and advanced thought by the short and simple process of disbelieving what your mother taught you. Here is a man, probably as great as you are, with as keen an intellect, and he clung to the Cross of Christ, and had for his favourite hymn—

'Rock of Ages, cleft for me,  
Let me hide myself in Thee.'

He leaves another lesson. If you desire to make your characters all that it is in them to be made, you must, like him, go to Jesus Christ, and get your teaching and

your inspiration from that great Lord. We cannot all be great men. Never mind. It is character that tells; we can all be good men, and we can all be Christian men. And whether we build cottages or palaces, if we build on one foundation, and only if we do, they will stand.

Moses leaves another lesson, as he glides into the past. 'This man, having served his generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was gathered to his fathers, and saw corruption'; but He 'whom God hath raised up saw no corruption.' The lamps are quenched, the sun shines. Moses dies, 'The prophets, do they live for ever?' but when Moses and Elias faded from the Mount of Transfiguration 'the apostles saw no man any more, save Jesus only,' and the voice said, 'This is My beloved Son; hear ye Him.'

### THE DECALOGUE: I—MAN AND GOD

'And God spake all these words, saying, 2. I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. 3. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. 4. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in the heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: 5. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; 6. And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. 7. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain. 8. Remember the sabbath-day, to keep it holy. 9. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: 10. But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: 11. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath-day, and hallowed it.'—EXODUS xx. 1-11.

AN obscure tribe of Egyptian slaves plunges into the desert to hide from pursuit, and emerges, after forty years, with a code gathered into 'ten words,' so brief, so complete, so intertwining morality and religion, so

free from local or national peculiarities, so close fitting to fundamental duties, that it is to-day, after more than three thousand years, authoritative in the most enlightened peoples. The voice that spoke from Sinai reverberates in all lands. The Old World had other lawgivers who professed to formulate their precepts by divine inspiration: they are all fallen silent. But this voice, like the trumpet on that day, waxes louder and louder as the years roll. Whose voice was it? The only answer explaining the supreme purity of the commandments, and their immortal freshness, is found in the first sentence of this paragraph, 'God spake all these words.'

I. We have first the revelation, which precedes and lays the foundation for the commandments; 'I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt.' God speaks to the nation as a whole, establishing a special relation between Himself and them, which is founded on His redeeming act, and is reciprocal, requiring that they should be His people, as He is their God. The manifestation in act of His power and of His love precedes the claim for reverence and obedience. This is a universal truth. God gives before He asks us to give. He is not a hard taskmaster, 'gathering where He has not strawn.' Even in that system which is eminently 'the law,' the foundation is a divine act of deliverance, and only when He has won the people for Himself by redeeming them from bondage does He call on them for obedience. His rule is built on benefits. He urges no mere right of the mightier, nor cares for service which is not the glad answer of gratitude. The flashing flames which ran as swift heralds before His descending chariot wheels, the quaking mountain, the long-drawn blasts of the

trumpet, awed the gathered crowd. But the first articulate words made a tenderer appeal, and sought to found His right to command on His love, and their duty to obey on their gratitude. The great gospel principle, that the Redeemer is the lawgiver, and the redeemed are joyful subjects because their hearts are touched with love, underlies the apparently sterner system of the Old Testament. God opens His heart first, and then asks for men's.

This prelude certainly confines the Decalogue to the people of Israel. Their deliverance is the ground on which the law is rested, therefore, plainly, the obligation can be no wider than the benefit. But though we are not bound to obey any of the Ten Commandments, because they were given to Israel, they are all, with one exception, demonstrably, a transcript of laws written on the heart of mankind; and this fact carries with it a strong presumption that the law of the Sabbath, which is the exception referred to, should be regarded as not an exception, but as a statute of the primeval law, witnessed to by conscience, republished in wondrous precision and completeness in these venerable precepts. The Ten Commandments are binding on us; but they are not binding as part, though the fundamental part, of the Jewish law.

Two general observations may be made. One is on the negative character of the commandments as a whole. Law prohibits because men are sinful. But prohibitions pre-suppose as their foundation positive commands. We are forbidden to do something because we are inclined to do it, and because we ought to do the opposite. Every 'thou shalt not' implies a deeper 'thou shalt.' The cold negation really rests on the converse affirmative command.

The second remark on the law as a whole is as to the relation which it establishes between religion and morality, making the latter a part of the former, but regarding it as secured only by the prior discharge of the obligations of the former. Morality is the garb of religion; religion is the animating principle of morality. The attempts to build up a theory of ethics without reference to our relations to God, or to secure the practice of righteousness without such reference, or to substitute, with a late champion of unbelief, 'the service of man' for the worship of God, are all condemned by the deeper and simpler wisdom of this law. Christians should learn the lesson, which the most Jewish of the New Testament writers had drawn from it, that 'pure and undefiled service' of God is the service of man, and should beware of putting asunder what God has joined so closely.

II. The first commandment bears in its negative form marks of the condition of the world when it was spoken, and of the strong temptation to polytheism which the Israelites were to resist. Everywhere but in that corner among the wild rocks of Sinai, men believed in 'gods many.' Egypt swarmed with them; and, no doubt, the purity of Abraham's faith had been sadly tarnished in his sons. We cannot understand the strange fascination of polytheism. It is a disease of humanity in an earlier stage than ours. But how strong it was and is, all history shows. All these many gods were on amicable terms with one another, and ready to welcome newcomers. But the monotheism, which was here laid at the very foundation of Israel's national life, parted it by a deep gulf from all the world, and determined its history.

The prohibition has little force for us; but the posi-



tive command which underlies it is of eternal force. We should rather think of it as a revelation and an invitation than as a mere command. For what is it but the declaration that at the centre of things is throned, not a rabble of godlings, nor a stony impersonal somewhat, nor a hypothetical unknowable entity, nor a shadowy abstraction, but a living Person, who can say 'Me,' and whom we can call on as 'Thou,' and be sure that He hears? No accumulation of finite excellences, however fair, can satisfy the imagination, which feels after one Being, the personal ideal of all perfectness. The understanding needs one ultimate Cause on which it can rest amid the dance of fleeting phenomena; the heart cannot pour out its love to be shared among many. No string of goodly pearls will ever give the merchantman assurance that his quest is complete. Only when human nature finds all in One, and that One a living Person, the Lover and Friend of all souls, does it fold its wings and rest as a bird after long flight.

The first commandment enjoins, or rather blesses us by showing us that we may cherish, supreme affection, worship, trust, self-surrender, aspiration, towards one God. After all, our God is that which we think most precious, for which we are ready to make the greatest sacrifices, which draws our warmest love; which, lost, would leave us desolate; which, possessed, makes us blessed. If we search our hearts with this 'candle of the Lord,' we shall find many an idol set up in their dark corners, and be startled to discover how much we need to bring ourselves to be judged and condemned by this commandment. It is the foundation of all human duty. Obedience to it is the condition of peace and blessedness, light and leading for mind, heart, will,

affections, desires, hopes, fears, and all the world within, that longs for one living Person even when it least knows the meaning of its longings and the reason of its unrest.

III. The second commandment forbids all representations, whether of the one God or of false deities. The golden calf, which was a symbol of Jehovah, is condemned equally with the fair forms that haunted the Greek Olympus, or the half-bestial shapes of Egyptian mythology. The reasons for the prohibition may be considered as two,—the impossibility of setting forth the glory of the Infinite Spirit in any form, and the certainty that the attempt will sink the worshipper deeper in the mire of sense. An image degrades God and damages men. By it religion reverses its nature, and becomes another clog to keep the soul among the things seen, and an ally of all fleshly inclinations. We know how idolatry seemed to cast a spell over the Israelites from Egypt to Babylon, and how their first relapse into it took place almost before the voice which ‘spake all these words’ had ceased.

In its grosser form, we have no temptation to it. But there are other ways of breaking the commandment than setting up an image. All sensuous worship in which the treacherous aid of art is called in to elevate the soul, comes perilously near to contradicting its spirit, if not its letter. The attempt to make of the senses a ladder for the soul to climb to God by, is a great deal more likely to end in the soul's going down the ladder than up it. The history of public worship in the Christian Church teaches that the less it has to do with such slippery help the better. There is a strong current running in England, at all events, in the direction of bringing in a more artistic, or, as it is called, a

'less bare,' form of service. We need to remember that the God who is a Spirit is worshipped 'in spirit,' and that outward forms may easily choke, and outward aids hinder, that worship.

The especial difficulty of obedience to this commandment is marked by the reason or sanction annexed. That opens a wide field, on which it would be folly to venture here. There is a glimpse of God's character, and a statement of a law of His working. He is a 'jealous' God. We need not be afraid of the word. It means nothing but what is congruous with the loftiest conception of a loving God. It means that He allows of no rival in our hearts' affection, or in our submission for love's sake to Him. A half trust in God is no trust. How can worship be shared, or love be parted out, among a pantheon? Our poor hearts ask of one another and get from one another, wherever a man and a woman truly love, just what God asks,—'All in all, or not at all.' His jealousy is but infinite love seeking to be known as such, and asking for a whole heart.

The law of His providence sounds hard, but it is nothing more than stating in plain words the course of the world's history, which cannot be otherwise if there is to be any bond of human society at all. We hear a great deal in modern language about solidarity (and sometimes it is spelled with a final 'e,' to look more philosophical) and heredity. The teaching of this commandment is simply a statement of the same facts, with the addition that the Lawgiver is visible behind the law. The consequences of conduct do not die with the doers. 'The evil that men do, lives after them.' The generations are so knit together, and the full results of deeds are often so slow-growing, that one

generation sows and another reaps. Who sowed the seed that fruited in misery, and was gathered in a bitter harvest of horrors and crimes in the French Revolution? Who planted the tree under which the citizens of the United States sit? Did not the seedling go over in the *Mayflower*? As long as the generations of men are more closely connected than those of sheep or birds, this solemn word must be true. Let us see that we sow no tares to poison our children when we are in our graves. The saying had immediate application to the consequences of idolatry in the history of Israel, and was a forecast of their future. But it is true evermore and everywhere.

IV. The third commandment must be so understood as to bring it into line with the two preceding, as of equal breadth and equally fundamental. It cannot, therefore, be confined to the use of the name of God in oaths, whether false or trivial. No doubt, perjury and profane swearing are included in the sweep of the prohibition; but it reaches far beyond them. The name of God is the declaration of His being and character. We take His name 'in vain' when we speak of Him unworthily. Many a glib and formal prayer, many a mechanical or self-glorifying sermon, many an erudite controversy, comes under the lash of this prohibition. Professions of devotion far more fervid than real, confessions in which the conscience is not stricken, orthodox teachings with no throb of life in them, unconscious hypocrisies of worship, and much besides, are gibbeted here. The most vain of all words are those which have become traditional stock in trade for religious people, which once expressed deep convictions, and are now a world too wide for the shrunk faith which wears them.

The positive side underlying the negative is the

requirement that our speech of God shall fit our thought of God, and our thought of Him shall fit His Name; that our words shall mirror our affections, and our affection be a true reflection of His beauty and sweetness; that cleansed lips shall reverently utter the Name above every name, which, after all speech, must remain unspoken; and that we shall feel it to be not the least wonderful or merciful of His condescensions that He 'is extolled with our tongues.'

V. The series of commandments referring to Israel's relations with God is distinctly progressive from the first to the fourth, which deals with the Sabbath. The fact that it appears here, side by side with these absolutely universal and first principles of religion and worship, clearly shows that the giver of the code regarded it as of equal comprehensiveness. If we believe that the giver of the code was God, we seem shut up to the conclusion that, though the Sabbath is a positive institution, and in so far unlike the preceding commandments, it is to be taken as not merely a temporary or Jewish ordinance. The ground on which it is rested here points to the same conclusion. The version of the Decalogue in Deuteronomy bases it on the Egyptian deliverance, but this, on the divine rest after creation. As we have already said, we do not regard the Decalogue as binding on us because given to Israel; but we do regard it as containing laws universally binding, which are written by God's finger, not on tables of stone, but on 'the fleshly tables of the heart.' All the others are admittedly of this nature. Is not the Sabbath law likewise? It is not, indeed, inscribed on the conscience, but is the need for it not stamped on the physical nature? The human organism requires the seventh-day rest, whether men toil with hand or

brain. Historically, it is not true that the Sabbath was founded by this legislation. The traces of its observance in Genesis are few and doubtful; but we know from the inscriptions that the seventh, fourteenth, twenty-first, and twenty-eighth days of the moon were set apart by the Assyrians, and scholars can supply other instances. The 'Remember' of this commandment can scarcely be urged as establishing this, for it may quite as naturally be explained to mean 'Remember, as each successive seventh day comes round, to consecrate it.' But apart from that, the law written on body, mind, and soul says plainly to all men, 'Rest on the seventh day.' Body and mind need repose; the soul needs quiet communion with God. No vigorous physical, intellectual, or religious life will long be kept up, if that need be disregarded. The week was meant to be given to work, which is blessed and right if done after the pattern of God's. The Sabbath was meant to lift to a share in His rest, to bring eternity into time, to renew wasted strength 'by a wise passiveness,' and to draw hearts dissipated by contact with fleeting tasks back into the stillness where they can find themselves in fellowship with God.

We have not the Jewish Sabbath, nor is it binding on us. But as men we ought to rest, and resting, to worship, on one day in the week. The unwritten law of Christianity, moulding all outward forms by its own free spirit, gradually, and without premeditation, slid from the seventh to the first day, as it had clear right to do. It was the day of Christ's resurrection, probably of His ascension, and of Pentecost. It is 'the Lord's Day.' In observing it, we unite both the reasons for the Sabbath given in Exodus and Deuteronomy,—the completion of a higher creation in the resurrection rest

of the Son of God, and the deliverance from a sorer bondage by a better Moses. The Christian Sunday and its religious observance are indispensable to the religious life of individuals and nations. The day of rest is indispensable to their well-being. Our hard-working millions will bitterly rue their folly, if they are tempted to cast it away on the plea of obtaining opportunities for intellectual culture and enjoyment. It is

‘The couch of time, care’s balm and bay,’

and we shall be wise if we hold fast by it; not because the Jews were bid to hallow the seventh day, but because we need it for repose, and we need it for religion.

## THE DECALOGUE: II.—MAN AND MAN

‘Honour thy father and thy mother; that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee. 13. Thou shalt not kill. 14. Thou shalt not commit adultery. 15. Thou shalt not steal. 16. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour. 17. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his man-servant, nor his maid-servant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour’s. 18. And all the people saw the thunderings and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and, when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. 19. And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die. 20. And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that His fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not. 21. And the people stood afar off: and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was.’—EXODUS xx. 12-21.

I. THE broad distinction between the two halves of the Decalogue is that the former deals with man’s relations to God, and the latter with His relations to men. This double division is recognised in the New Testament summary of ‘all the law,’ as found in two commandments, and is probably implied in the two tables on which it was inscribed. Commentators have been much exercised, however, about how to divide the commandments between these two parts. The fifth,

which is the first in this division, belongs in substance to the second half, but its form connects it with the first table. It is like the preceding ones in having a reason appended, and in naming 'the Lord thy God'; while the following are all bare, curt prohibitions. The fact seems to be that it is a transition commandment, and meant to cast special sacredness round the parental relationship, by paralleling it, in some sense, with that to God, of which it is a reflection. Other duties to other men stand on a different level from duties to parents. 'Honour,' which is to be theirs, is not remote from the reverence due to God. They are, as it were, His shadows to the child. The fatherhood of God is dimly revealed in that parting off the commandment from the second table, and assimilating it in form to the laws of the first.

II. The connection of the two halves of the Decalogue teaches some important truth. Josephus said a wise thing when he remarked that, 'whereas other legislators had made religion a department of virtue, Moses made virtue a department of religion.' No theory of morals is built upon the deepest foundation which does not recognise the final ground of the obligation of duty in the voice of God. Duty is *debitum*—debt. Who is the creditor? Myself? An impersonal law? Society? No, God. The practice of morality depends, like its theory, on religion. In the long-run, and on the wide scale, nations and periods which have lost the latter will not long keep the former in any vigour or purity. He who begins by erasing the first commandment will sooner or later make a clean sweep of all the ten. And, on the other hand, wherever there is true worship of the one God, there all fair charities between man and man will flourish and fruit. The two tables are one



law. Duties to God come first, and those to man, who is made in the image of God, flow from these.

III. The order of these human duties is significant. We have, next after the law of parental reverence, three commandments, which, in a descending series of importance, forbid crimes against life, marriage, and property. Then the law passes from deeds to the more subtle, and, as men think, less grave, offences of the tongue. Next it crosses the boundary which divides human from divine law, and crimes from sins, to take cognisance of unspoken and unacted desires. So the order of progress in the first table is exactly the reverse of that in the second. There we begin with inward devotion, and travel outwards by deed and word to the sabbatical institution; here we begin with overt acts, and travel inwards, through words, to the hidden desire. The end touches the beginning. For that which we 'covet' is our God; and the first commandment is only obeyed when our hearts hunger after Him, and not after earth. The sequence here corresponds to the order of progress in our knowledge and practice of our human duties. The first thing that the rudest state of society has to do is to establish some kind of security for life and property and woman's honour. The worst men know that much as their duty, however foul may be their lips, and hot their passions. Then the recognition of the sanctity of the great gift of speech, and the supreme obligations of veracity, grow upon men as they get above the earlier stage. Most children pass through a phase when they tell lies as pastime, and most rude societies and half-moralised men have a similar epoch. Last of all, when actions have been bridled and the tongue taught the law of truth, comes the full recognition that the work is not done till the

silent longing of a hungry heart is stilled, and that unselfish love of our neighbour is only perfect when we can rejoice in his good and wish none of it for ourselves. The second table is a chart of moral progress.

IV. The scope of these laws has often been violently stretched so as to include all human duty ; but without tugging at them so as to make them cover everything, we may note briefly how far they extend. We are scarcely warranted in taking any of them but the last, as going deeper than overt acts, for, though our Lord has taught in the Sermon on the Mount that hatred is murder, and impure desire adultery, that is His deepening of the commandment. But it is quite fair to bring out the positive precept which, in each case, underlies the stern, short prohibition.

The fifth commandment shares with the fourth the distinction of being a positive command. It enjoins 'honour,' not 'love,' partly because, in olden times, the father was a prince in his house in a sense that has long since ceased to be true, partly because there was less need to enjoin the affection which is in some degree instinctive, than the submission and respect which the children are tempted to withhold, partly in order to suggest the analogy with reverence to God. A strange change has passed over the relations of parents and children, even within a generation. There is more, perhaps, of frank familiar intercourse, which, no doubt, is an improvement on the old style. But there is a great deal less of what the commandment enjoins. City life, education, the general impairing of the idea of authority, which we see everywhere, have told upon many families ; and many a father who, by indulgence or by too much engrossment in business, lets the children twitch the reins out of his hands, might lament,

as his grown-up children spurn control, 'If then I be a father, where is mine honour?' There is no one of the commandments which it is more needful to preach in England than this.

The promise attached to it has another side of threatening. It is a plain fact that when the paternal relation is corrupted, a powerful solvent has been introduced which rapidly tends to disintegrate society. The most ancient empire in the world to-day, China, has, amid many vices and follies, been preserved mainly by the profound reverence to ancestors which is largely its real working religion. The most vigorous power in the old world, Rome, owed its iron might not only to its early simplicity of life and its iron tenacity, but to the strength of paternal authority and the willingness of filial obedience. No more serious damage can be inflicted on society or on individuals than the weakening of the honour paid to fathers and mothers.

'Thou shalt not kill' forbids not only the act of murder, but all that endangers life. It enjoins all care, diligence, and effort to preserve it. A man who looks on while another drowns, or who sends a ship out half manned and overloaded, breaks it as really as a red-handed murderer. But the commandment was not intended to touch the questions of capital punishment or of war. These were allowed under the Jewish code, and cannot therefore be supposed to be prohibited here. How far either is consistent with the deepest meaning of the law, as expanded and reconsecrated in Christianity, is another question. Their defenders have to execute some startling feats of gymnastics to harmonise either with the New Testament.

'Curus kind o' Christian dooty,  
This 'ere cuttin' folks's throats.'

The ground of the commandment is not given, seeing that conscience is expected to admit its force as soon as stated. But its place at the head of the second table brings it into connection with the first commandment, and suggests that man's life is sacred because he is the image of God. As Christians, we are bound to interpret it on the lines which Christ has laid down; according to which, hatred is murder, and love is the fulfilling of this as of all other laws. So Luther's comprehensive summing up of the duties enjoined may be accepted: 'Patience, gentleness, kindness, peaceableness, pity, and, of all things, a sweet, friendly heart, without any hate, anger, bitterness, toward any, even enemies.'

In like manner, the seventh commandment sanctifies wedded life, and is the first step in that true reverence of woman which marked the Jewish people through all their history, and was in such contrast to her position in all other ancient societies. Purity in all the relations of the sexes, the control of passion, the reverence for marriage, are subjects difficult to speak of in public. But modern society sorely needs some plain speaking on these subjects—abundance of bread and idleness, facilities for divorce, the filth which newspapers lay down on every breakfast-table, the insidious sensuality of much fiction and art, the licence of the stage. The opportunities for secret profligacy in great cities conspire to loosen the bonds of morality. I would venture to ask public teachers seriously to consider their duty in this matter, and to seek for opportunities wisely to warn budding youth of the pitfalls in its path.

What is 'stealing'? As Luther says, 'It is the smallest part of the thieves that are hung. If we are to hang them all, where shall we get rope enough? We must make all our belts and straps into halters.'

Theft is the taking or keeping what is not 'mine.' But what do we mean by 'mine'? Communists tell us that 'property is theft.' But that is the exaggeration of the scriptural teaching that all property is trust property, that possessions are 'mine' on conditions and for purposes, that I cannot 'do what I will with mine own,' but am a steward, set to dispense it to those who want. The Christian doctrine of stewardship extends this commandment over much ground which we seldom think of as affected by it. All sharp practice in business, the shopkeeper's false weights and the merchant's equivalents of these, adulterations, pirating trademarks, imitating a rival's goods, infringing patents, and the like, however disguised by fine names, are neither more nor less than stealing. Many a prosperous gentleman says solemnly every Sunday of his life, 'Incline our hearts to keep this law,' who would have to live in a much more modest fashion if his prayer were, by any unfortunate accident, answered.

False witness is not only given in court. The sins of the tongue against the law of love are more subtle and common than those of act. 'Come, let us enjoy ourselves, and abuse our neighbours,' is the real meaning of many an invitation to social intercourse. If some fairy could treat our newspapers as the Russian censors do, and erase all the lies about the opposite side, which they report and coin, how many blank columns there would be! If all the words of ill-natured calumny, of uncharitable construction of their friends, which people speak, could be made inaudible, what stretches of silence would open out in much animated talk! 'A man that beareth false witness against his neighbour is a maul, and a sword, and a sharp arrow.'

But deed and word will not be right unless the heart

be right; and the heart will be wrong unless it be purged of the bitter black drop of covetousness. The desire to make my neighbour's goods mine is the parent of all breaches of neighbourly duty, even as its converse 'love' is the fulfilling of it all; for such desire implies that I am ruled by selfishness, and that I would willingly deprive another of goods, for my own gratification. Such a temper, like a wild boar among vineyards, will trample down all the rich clusters in order to slake its own thirst. Find a man who yields to his desires after his neighbour's goods, and you find a man who will break all commandments like a hornet in a spider's web. Be he a Napoleon, and glorified as a conqueror and hero, or be he some poor thief in a jail, he has let his covetousness get the upper hand, and so all wrong-doing is possible. Nor is it only the second table which covetousness dashes to fragments. It serves the first in the same fashion; for, as St. Paul puts it, the covetous man 'is an idolater,' and is as incapable of loving God as of loving his neighbour. This final commandment, overleaping the boundary between conduct and character, and carrying the light of duty into the dark places of the heart, where deeds are fashioned, sets the whole flock of bats and twilight-loving creatures in agitation. It does what is the main work of the law, in compelling us to search our hearts, and in convincing of sin. It is the converse of the thought that all the law is contained in love; for it closes the list of sins with one which begets them all, and points us away from actions and words which are its children to selfish desire as in itself the transgression of all the law, whether it be that which prescribes our relations to God or that which enjoins our duties to man.

## THE FEAST OF INGATHERING IN THE END OF THE YEAR

'And the feast of harvest, the first-fruits of thy labours, which thou hast sown in thy field; and the feast of ingathering, which is in the end of the year, when thou hast gathered in thy labours out of the field.'—EXODUS xxiii. 16.

THE Israelites seem to have had a double beginning of the year—one in spring, one at the close of harvest; or it may only be that here the year is regarded from the natural point of view—a farmer's year. This feast was at the gathering in of the fruits, which was the natural close of the agricultural year.

This festival of ingathering was the Feast of Tabernacles. It is remarkable that the three great sacred festivals, the Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles, had all a reference to agriculture, though two of them also received a reference to national deliverances. This fact may show that they were in existence before Moses, and that he simply imposed a new meaning on them.

Be that as it may, I take these words now simply as a starting-point for some thoughts naturally suggested by the period at which we stand. We have come to the end of another year—looked for so long, passed so swiftly, and now seeming to have so utterly departed!

I desire to recall to you and to myself the solemn real sense in which for us too the end of the year is a 'time of ingathering' and 'harvest.' We too begin the new year with the accumulated consequences of these past days in our 'barns and garners.'

Now, in dealing with this thought, let me put it in two or three forms.

I. Think of the past as still living in and shaping the present.

It is a mere illusion of sense that the past is gone utterly. 'Thou carriest them away, as with a flood.' We speak of it as irrevocable, unalterable, that dreadful past. It is solemnly true that 'ye shall no more return that way.'

But there is a deeper truth in the converse thought that the apparently transient is permanent, that nothing human ever dies, that the past is present. 'The grass withereth, the flower fadeth,'—yes, but only its petals drop, and as they fall, the fruit which they sheltered swells and matures.

The thought of the present as the harvest from the past brings out in vivid and picturesque form two solemn truths.

The first is the passing away of all the external, but of it only. It has all gone where the winter's cold, the spring rains, the summer's heats have gone. But just as these live in the fruitful results that have accrued from them, just as the glowing sunshine of the departed ardent summer is in the yellow, bending wheat-ear or glows in the cluster, so, in a very solemn sense, 'that which hath been is now' in regard to every life. The great law of continuity makes the present the inheritor of the past. That law operates in national life, in which national characteristics are largely precipitates, so to speak, from national history. But it works even more energetically, and with yet graver consequences, in our individual lives. 'The child is father of the man.' What we are depends largely on what we have been, and what we have been powerfully acts in determining what we shall be. Life is a mystic chain, not a heap of unconnected links.

And there is another very solemn way in which the past lives on in each of us. For not only is our present self the direct descendant of our past selves, but that



past still subsists in that we are responsible for it, and shall one day have to answer for it. The writer of Ecclesiastes followed the statement just now quoted as to the survival of the past, with another, which is impressive in its very vagueness: 'God seeketh again that which is passed away.'

So the undying past lives in its results in ourselves, and in our being answerable for it to God.

This metaphor is insufficient in one respect. There is not one epoch for sowing and another for reaping, but the two processes are simultaneous, and every moment is at once a harvest and a seed-time.

This fact masks the reality of the reaping here, but it points on to the great harvest when God shall say, 'Gather the wheat into My barns!'

II. Notice some specific forms of this reaping and ingathering.

(1) Memory.

It is quite possible that in the future it may embrace all the life.

'Chambers of imagery.'

(2) Habits and character. Like the deposit of a flood. 'Habitus' means clothing, and cloth is woven from single threads.

(3) Outward consequences, position, reputation, etc.

III. Make a personal reference to ourselves.

What sort of harvest are we carrying over from this year? Lay this to heart as certain, that we enter on no new year—or new day—empty-handed, but always 'bearing our sheaves with us.' 'Be not deceived! God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.'

But remember, that while this law remains, there is also the law of forgiveness, 'Go in peace!' and there may be a new beginning, 'Sin no more!'

## 'THE LOVE OF THINE ESPOUSALS'

'And He said unto Moses, Come up unto the Lord, thou, and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and worship ye afar off. 2. And Moses alone shall come near the Lord; but they shall not come nigh, neither shall the people go up with him. 3. And Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the Lord hath said will we do. 4. And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. 5. And he sent young men of the children of Israel, which offered burnt-offerings, and sacrificed peace-offerings of oxen unto the Lord. 6. And Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basons; and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. 7. And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient. 8. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words. 9. Then went up Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; 10. And they saw the God of Israel: and there was under His feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire-stone, and as it were the body of heaven in His clearness. 11. And upon the nobles of the children of Israel He laid not His hand: also they saw God, and did eat and drink. 12. And the Lord said unto Moses, Come up to Me into the mount, and be there: and I will give thee tables of stone, and a law, and commandments which I have written; that thou mayest teach them.'—EXODUS xxiv. 1-12.

AN effort is needed to feel what a tremendous and unique fact is narrated in these words. Next to the incarnation, it is the most wonderful and far-reaching moment in history. It is the birthday of a nation, which is God's son. It is the foundation stone of all subsequent revelation. Its issues oppress that ancient people to-day, and its promises are not yet exhausted. It is history, not legend, nor the product of later national vanity. Whatever may come of analysing 'sources' and of discovering 'redactors,' Israel held a relation to God all its own; and that relation was constituted thus.

I. Note the preliminaries of the covenant. The chapter begins with the command to Moses to come up to the mount, with Aaron and other representatives of the people. But he was already there when the command was given, and a difficulty has been found (or, shall we say, made) out of this. The explanation seems reasonable and plain enough, that the long

section extending from Exodus xx. 22, and containing the fundamental laws as spoken by God, is closed by our verses 1 and 2, which imply, in the very order to Moses to come up with his companions, that he must first go down to bring them. God dismisses him as a king might end an audience with his minister, by bidding him return with attendants. The singular use of the third person in reference to Moses in the third verse is not explained by supposing another writer; for, whoever wrote it, it would be equally anomalous.

So he comes down from the stern cloud-encircled peak to that great plain where the encampment lay, and all eyes watch his descent. The people gather round him, eager and curious. He recounts 'all the judgments,' the series of laws, which had been lodged in his mind by God, and is answered by the many-voiced shout of too swiftly promised obedience. Glance over the preceding chapters, and you will see how much was covered by 'all that the Lord hath spoken.' Remember that every lip which united in that lightly made vow drew its last breath in the wilderness, because of disobedience, and the burst of homage becomes a sad witness to human weakness and changefulness. The glory of God flashed above them on the barren granite, the awful voice had scarcely died into desert silence, nerves still tingled with excitement, and wills were bowed before Jehovah, manifestly so near. For a moment, the people were ennobled, and obedience seemed easy. They little knew what they were saying in that brief spasm of devotion. It was high-water then, but the tide soon turned, and all the ooze and ugliness, covered now, lay bare and rotting. 'Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.' We may take the

lesson to ourselves, and see to it that emotion consolidates into strenuous persistency, and does not die in the very excitement of the vow.

The pledge of obedience was needed before the Covenant could be made, and, as we shall find, was reiterated in the very centre of the ceremonial ratification. For the present, it warranted Moses in preparing for the morrow's ritual. His first step was to prepare a written copy of the laws to which the people had sworn. Here we come across an old, silenced battery from which a heavy fire used to be directed against the historical accuracy of the Pentateuch. Alphabetic writing was of a later date. There could not have been a written code. The statement was a mere attempt of a later age to claim antiquity for comparatively modern legislation. It was no more historical than similar traditions in other countries, Sibylline books, etc. All that is out of court now. Perhaps some other guns will be spiked in due time, that make a great noise just at present. Then comes the erection of a rude altar, surrounded by twelve standing stones, just as on the east of Jordan we may yet see dolmens and menhirs. The altar represents the divine presence; and the encircling stones, Israel gathered around its God. The group is a memorial and a witness to the people,—and a witness against them, if disobedient. Thus two permanent records were prepared, the book and the monument. The one which seemed the more lasting has perished; the more fragile has endured, and will last to the world's end.

II. Note the rite of ratification of the covenant. The ceremonial is complex and significant. We need not stay on the mere picture, impressive and, to our eyes, strange as it is, but rather seek to bring out the

meaning of these smoking offerings, and that blood flung on the altar and on the crowd. First came two sorts of sacrifices, offered not by priests, but by selected young men, probably one for each tribe, whose employment in sacrificial functions shows the priestly character of the whole nation, according to the great words of Exodus xix. 6. Burnt-offerings and peace-offerings differed mainly in the use made of the sacrifice, which was wholly consumed by fire in the former, while it was in part eaten by the offerer in the latter. The one symbolised entire consecration; the other, communion with God on the basis of sacrifice. The sin-offering does not appear here, as being of later origin, and the product of the law, which deepened the consciousness of transgression. But these sacrifices, at the threshold of the covenant, receive an expiatory character by the use made of the blood, and witness to the separation between God and man, which renders amity and covenant friendship impossible, without a sacrifice.

They must have yielded much blood. It is divided into two parts, corresponding to the two parties to the covenant, like the cloven animals in Abraham's covenant. One half is 'sprinkled' on the altar, or, as the word means, 'swung,'—which suggests a larger quantity and a more vehement action than 'sprinkling' does. That drenching of the altar with gore is either a piece of barbarism or a solemn symbol of the central fact of Christianity no less than of Judaism, and a token that the only footing on which man can be received into fellowship with God is through the offering of a pure life, instead of the sinner, which, accepted by God, covers or expiates sin. There can be no question that the idea of expiation is at the very

foundation of the Old Testament ritual. It is fashionable to regard the expiatory element of Christianity as 'Hebrew old clothes,' but the fact is the other way about. It is not that Christianity has not been able to rid itself of a rude and false conception, but that 'Judaism' had its sacrifices appointed by God, in order to prepare the way for the true offering, which takes away sin.

The expiation by blood having been thus made, the hindrances to the nation's entering into covenant are removed. Therefore follows in logical order the next step, their formal (alas! how purely formal it proved to be) taking on themselves its obligations. The freshly written 'book' is produced, and read there, to the silent people, before the bloody altar, beneath the peak of Sinai. Again the chorus of assent from a thousand throats echoes among the rocks. They accept the conditions. They had done so last night; but this is the actual contract on their part, and its place in the whole order of the ceremony is significant. It follows expiation, without which man cannot enter into friendship with God, without the acceptance of which man will not yield himself in obedience. The vows which God approves are those of men whose sins are covered.

The final step was the sprinkling of the people with the blood. The division of the blood into two portions signifies that it had an office in regard to each party to the covenant. If it had been possible to pour it all on the altar, and then all on the people, that would have been done. The separation into two portions was inevitable; but in reality it is the same blood which, sprinkled on the altar, expiates, and on the worshipper, consecrates, cleanses, unites to God, and brings into covenant with Him. Hence Moses accom-

panies the sprinkling of the people with the explanation, 'This is the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you, upon all these conditions' (Rev. Ver. margin). It ratifies the compact on both sides. God 'hath made' it, in accepting the sprinkled blood; they have made it, in being sprinkled therewith. But while the rite sets forth the great gospel truth of expiation, the Covenant moves within the region of law. It is made 'on the basis of all these words,' and is voidable by disobedience. It is the *Magna Charta* of the nation, and its summing up is 'this do, and thou shalt live.' Its promises are mainly of outward guardianship and national blessings. And these are suspended by it, as they were in fact contingent, on the national observance of the national vow.

The general idea of a covenant is that of a compact between two parties, each of whom comes under obligations contingent on the other's discharge of his. Theologians have raised the question whether God's covenant is of this kind. Surely it is. His promises to Israel had an 'if,' and the fulfilment of the conditions necessarily secured the accomplishment of the promises. The ritual of the first covenant transcends the strictly retributive compact which it ratified, and shadows a gospel beyond law, even the new covenant which brings better gifts, and does not turn on 'do,' but simply on the sprinkling with the blood of Jesus. The words of Moses were widened to carry a blessing beyond his thoughts, which was disclosed when, in an upper chamber, a dying man said to the twelve representatives of the true Israel, 'This is the new covenant in My blood, drink ye all of it.' The blood which Moses sprinkled gave ritual cleansing, but it remained outside the man. The blood of Jesus gives

true purification, and passes into our veins to become our life. The covenant by Moses was 'do and live'; that in Christ is 'believe and live.' Moses brought commandments, and on them his covenant was built; Christ brings gifts, and His covenant is all promises, which are ours on the simple condition of taking them.

III. Note the vision and feast on the basis of the covenant. The little company that climbed the mountain, venturing within the fence, represented the whole people. Aaron and his sons were the destined priests. The elders were probably seventy, because that number is the product of the two perfect numbers, and perhaps with allusion to the seventy souls who went down into Egypt with Jacob. It is emphatically said that they saw 'the God of Israel,' for that day's covenant had made him so in a new closeness of relationship. In token of that new access to and possession in Him, which was henceforth to be the prerogative of the obedient people, some manifestation of His immediate presence was poured on their astonished eyes. It is needless to inquire its nature, or to ask how such a statement is consistent with the spirituality of the divine nature, or with what this same book of Exodus says, 'There shall no man see Me, and live.' The plain intention is to assert that there was a visible manifestation of the divine presence, but no attempt is made to describe it. Our eyes are stayed at the pavement beneath His feet, which was blue as sapphire, and bright as the cloudless sky gleaming above Sinai. It is enough to learn that 'the secret of the Lord is with them' to whom He shows 'His covenant'; that, by the power of sacrifice, a true vision of God may be ours, which is 'in a mirror, darkly,' indeed, but yet is real and all sufficing. Before the covenant was



made, Israel had been warned to keep afar lest He should break through on them, but now 'He laid not His hand' upon them; for only blessing can stream from His presence now, and His hand does not crush, but uphold.

Nor is this all which we learn of the intercourse with God which is possible on the ground of His covenant. They 'did eat and drink.' That may suggest that the common enjoyments of the natural life are in no way inconsistent with the vision of God; but more probably it is meant to teach a deeper lesson. We have remarked that the ritual of the peace-offering included a feast on the sacrifice 'before the Lord,' by which was signified communion with Him, as at His table, and this meal has the same meaning. They who stand in covenant relations with God, feed and feast on a sacrifice, and thereby hold fellowship with Him, since He too has accepted the sacrifice which nourishes them. So that strange banquet on Sinai taught a fact which is ever true, prophesied the deepest joys of Christian experience, which are realised in the soul that eats the flesh and drinks the blood of Christ, the Mediator of the new covenant, and dimly shadowed the yet future festival, when, cleansed and consecrated by His blood, they who have made a covenant with Him by His sacrifice, shall be gathered unto Him in the heavenly mount, where He makes a 'feast of fat things and wines on the lees well refined,' and there shall sit, for ever beholding His glory, and satisfied with the provisions of His house.

## THE BREAD OF THE PRESENCE

'Thou shalt set upon the table shew-bread before Me alway.'—EXODUS xxv. 30.

I SUSPECT that to many readers the term 'shew-bread' conveys little more meaning than if the Hebrew words had been lifted over into our version. The original expression, literally rendered, is 'bread of the face'; or, as the Revised Version has it in the margin, 'presence bread,' and the meaning of that singular designation is paraphrased and explained in my text: 'Thou shalt set upon the table, bread of the presence before Me always.' It was bread, then, which was laid in the presence of God. The directions with regard to it may be very briefly stated. Every Sabbath the priests laid upon the table which stood on one side of the Altar of Incense, in the Inner Court, two piles of loaves, on each of which piles was placed a pan of incense. They lay there for a week, being replaced by fresh ones on the coming Sabbath.

The Altar of Incense in the middle symbolised the thought that the priestly life, which was the life of the nation, and is the life of the Christian both individually and collectively, is to be centrally and essentially a life of prayer. On one side of it stood the great golden lamp which, in like manner, declared that the activities of the priestly life, which was the life of Israel, and is the life of the Christian individually and collectively, is to be, in its manward aspect, a light for the world. On the other side of the Altar of Incense stood this table with its loaves. What does it say about the life of the priest, the Church, and the individual Christian? That is the question that I wish to try to answer here; and

in doing so let me first ask you to look at the thing itself, and then to consider its connection with the other two articles in connection with which it made a threefold oneness.

I. Let me deal with this singular provision of the ancient ritual by itself alone.

Bread is a product at once of God's gift and of man's work. In the former aspect, He 'leaves not Himself without witness, in that,' in the yearly miracle of the harvest, 'He gives us bread from Heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness'; in the latter, considered as a product of man's activity, agriculture is, if not the first, at all events in settled communities the prime, form of human industry. The farmer and the baker begin the series of man's industries. So that these loaves were fitly taken as representatives of all kinds of human industry and their products, and as such were consecrated to God. That is the broad significance of this institution, which, as we shall have to see, links itself with the other two conceptions of the priestly life in its Godward and in its manward aspect. Now the first thing that is suggested, therefore, is the plain obligation, which is also a blessed privilege, for all men who are priests of God by faith in, and union with, the great High Priest, that they lay all their activities as an offering before God. The loaves in their very place on that table, right in front of the veil that parted the Inner Court from the inmost of all, where the Shekinah shone, and the Cherubim bowed in worship, tell us that in some sense they, too, were an offering, and that the table was an altar. Their sacrificial character is emphasised by the fact that upon the top of each of the piles there was laid a pan of incense.

So, then, the whole was an offering of Israel's activities and its results to God. And we, Christian men and women, have to make an offering of all our active life, and all its products. That thought opens up many considerations, one or two of which I ask leave to touch briefly. First, then, if my active life is to be an offering to God, that means that I am to surrender myself. And that surrender means three things: first, that in all my daily work I am to set Him before me as my end; second, that in all my daily work I am to set Him before me as my law; third, that in all my daily work I am to set Him before me as my power. As for the first, whatever a man does for any motive other, and with any end less, than God and His Glory, that act, beautiful as it may be in other respects, loses its supreme beauty, and falls short of perfect nobleness, just in the measure in which other motives, or other ends, than this supreme one, are permitted to dominate it. I do not contend for such an impossible suppression of myself as that my own blessedness and the like shall be in no manner my end, but I do maintain this, that in good old language, 'Man's chief end is to glorify God,' and that anything which I do, unless it is motivated by this regard to Him as its 'chief end,' loses its noblest consecration, and is degraded from its loftiest beauty. The Altar sanctifies, and not only sanctifies but ennobles, the gift. That which has in it the taint of self-regard so pronouncedly and dominantly as that God is shut out, is like some vegetation down in low levels at the bottom of a vale, which never has the sun to shine upon it. But let it rise as some tree above the brushwood until its topmost branches are in the light, and then it is glorified. To live to self is ignoble and mean; to live for others is higher and nobler. But

highest and noblest of all is to offer the loaves to God, and to make Him the end of all our activities.

Again, there is another consideration, bearing on another region in which the assertive self is only too apt to spoil all work. And that is, that if our activities are offerings to God, this means that His supreme Will is to be our law, and that we obey His commands and accept His appointments in quiet submission. The tranquillity of heart, the accumulation of power, which come to men when they, from the depths, say, 'Not my will but Thine be done'; 'Speak, Lord! for Thy servant heareth,' cannot be too highly stated. There is no such charm to make life quiet and strong as the submission of the will to God's providences, and the swift obedience of the will to God's commandments. And whilst to make self my end mars what else is beautiful, making self my law mars it even more.

Further, we offer our activities to God when we fall back upon Him as our one power, and say, 'Perfect Thy strength in my weakness.' He that goes out into the world to do his daily work, of whatsoever sort it is—you in your little sphere, or I in mine—in dependence upon himself, is sure to be defeated. He that says 'we have no strength against this great multitude that cometh against us, but our eyes are unto Thee,' will, sooner or later, be able to go back with joy, and say, 'the Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad.' The man that goes into the fight like that foolish prime minister of France under the Empire, 'with a light heart,' will very soon find his Sedan, and have shamefully to surrender. Brethren, these three things, making God the end of my work; making God's will the law of my work; making God's strength the power of my work; these

are the ways by which we, too, can bring our little pile of barley bread, and lay it upon that table.

Again, this consecration of life's activities is to be carried out by treating their products, as well as themselves, as offerings to God. The loaves were the results of human activity. They were also the products of divine gifts elaborated by human effort. And both things are true about all the bread that you and I have been able to make for the satisfaction of our desires, or the sustenance of our strength—it comes ultimately from the gift of God. In regard to this consecration of the product of our activities, as well as of our activities themselves, I have but two words to offer, and the one is, let us see to it that we consecrate our enjoyment of God's gifts by bringing that enjoyment, as well as the activities which He has blessed to produce it, into His presence. That table bore the symbols of the grateful recognition of God's mercies by the people. And when our hearts are glad, and our 'bosom's lord sits lightly on his throne,' we have special need to take care that our joy be not godless, nor our enjoyment of His gifts be without reference to Himself. 'Ah,' you say, 'that is a threadbare commonplace.' Yes, it is, dear friends; it is a commonplace just because it is needful at every turn, if we are to make our lives what they ought to be.

May I say another thing? and that is, that the loaves that were laid within the Sanctuary were not intended to be separated from the others that were eaten in the tents, nor were they meant to be a kind of purchasing of an indulgence, or of a right, by surrendering a little, to the godless and selfish enjoyment of the rest of the batch, or of the rest of the harvest. Let us apply that to our money, which is one of the products of our activities; and not fancy, as a great many people do,

that what we give as a subscription to some benevolent or religious institution buys for us the right to spend all the rest selfishly. That is another commonplace, very threadbare and very feeble, when we speak it, but with claws and teeth in it that will lay hold of us, when we try to put it in practice. The enjoyments and the products of our daily activities are to be offered to God.

Still further, this table with its burden has suggestions that as Christians we are bound to bring all our work to Him for His judgment upon it. The loaves were laid right in front of the veil, behind which blazed the light of His presence. And that meant that they were laid before 'those pure eyes and perfect judgment of all-judging' God. Whether we bring our activities there or no, of course in a very real and solemn sense they are there. But what I desire to insist upon now is how important, for the nobleness and purity of our daily lives, it is that we should be in the continual habit of realising to ourselves the thought that whatever we do, we do before His Face. The Roman Catholics talk about 'the practice of the presence of God.' One does not like the phrase, but all true religion will practise what is meant by it. And for us it should be as joyous to think, 'Thou God seest me,' as it is for a child to play or work with a quiet heart, because it knows that its mother is sitting somewhere not very far off and watching that no harm comes to it. That thought of being in His presence would be for us a tonic, and a test. How it would pull us up in many a meanness, and keep our feet from wandering into many forbidden ways, if there came like a blaze of light into our hearts the thought: 'Thou God seest me!' There are many of our activities, I am

afraid, which we should not like to put down on that table. Can *you* think of any in *your* lives that you would be rather ashamed to lay there, and say to Him, 'Judge Thou this'? Then do not do it. That is a brief, but a very stringent, easily applied, and satisfactory test of a great many doubtful things. If you cannot take them into the Inner Court, and lay them down there, and say, 'Look, Lord! this is my baking,' be sure that they are made, not of wholesome flour, but of poisoned grain, and that there is death in them.

Further, this table, with its homely burden of twelve poor loaves, may suggest to us how the simplest, smallest, most secular of our activities is a fit offering to Him. The loaves were not out of place amidst the sanctities of the spot, nor did they seem to be incongruous with the golden altar and the golden lampstand, and yet they were but twelve loaves. The poorest of our works is fit to be carried within the shrine, and laid upon His altar. We may be sure that He delights even in the meanest and humblest of them, if only we take them to Him and say: 'All things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee.' Ah! there are a great many strange things in Christ's treasury. Mothers will hoard up trifles that belonged to their children, which everybody else thinks worthless. Jesus Christ has in His storehouse a 'cup of cold water,' the widows' mites, and many another thing that the world counts of no value, and He recognises as precious. There is an old story about some great emperor making a progress through his dominions, where he had been receiving precious gifts from cities and nobles, and as the gay *cortège* was passing a poor cottage, the peasant-owner came out with a coarse earthenware cup filled with spring water in his hand, and offered it to his



overlord as the only gift that he could give. The king accepted it, and ennobled him on the spot. Take your barley loaves to Christ, and He will lay them up in His storehouse.

II. Now I need only say a word or two about the other aspect of this table of shew-bread, taken with the other two articles in conjunction with which it formed a unity.

The lamp and the table go together. They are both offshoots from the altar in the middle. That is to say, your lives will not shine before men unless your activities are offered to God. The smallest taint of making self your end, your law, or your strength, mingling with your lives, and manifest in their actions, will dim the light which shines from them, and men will be very quick to find out and say, 'He calls himself a Christian; but he lives for himself.' Neither the light, which is the radiance of a Christian life manwards, can be sustained without the offering of the life in its depths to God, nor can the activities of the life be acceptably offered to Him, unless the man that offers them 'lets his light shine before men.' The lamp and the table must go together.

The lamp and the table must together be offshoots from the altar. If there be not in the centre of the life aspiration after Him in the depths of the heart, communion with Him in the silent places of the soul, then there will be little brightness in the life to ray out amongst men, and there will be little consecration of the activities to be laid before God. The reason why the manifold bustle and busy-ness of the Christian Church to-day sows so much and reaps so little, lies mainly here, that they have forgotten to a large extent how the altar in the centre must give the oil for the

lamp to shine, and the grain to be made into the loaves. And, on the other hand, the altar in the middle needs both its flanking accompaniments. For the Christian life is to be no life of cloistered devotion and heavenward aspiration only or mainly, but is to manifest its still devotion and its heavenward aspiration by the consecration of its activities to God, and the raying of them out into a darkened world. The service of man is the service of God, for lamp and table are offshoots of the altar. But the service of God is the basis of the best service of man, for the altar stands between the lamp and the table.

So, brethren, let us blend these three aspects into a unity, the Altar, the Lamp, the Table, and so shall we minister aright, and men will call us the 'priests of the Most High God,' till we pass within the veil where, better than the best of us here can do, we shall be able to unite still communion and active service, and shine as the sun in the Kingdom of our Father. 'His servants shall serve Him' with priestly ministrations, 'and shall see His face, and His name shall be in their foreheads.'

### THE GOLDEN LAMPSTAND

'Thou shalt make a candlestick of pure gold. . . .'-EXODUS XXV. 31.

IF we could have followed the Jewish priest as he passed in his daily ministrations into the Inner Court, we should have seen that he first piled the incense on the altar which stood in its centre, and then turned to trim the lamps of the golden candlestick which flanked it on one side. Of course it was not a candlestick, as our versions misleadingly render the word. That

was an article of furniture unknown in those days. It was a lampstand; from a central upright stem branched off on either side three arms decorated with what the Book calls 'beaten work,' and what we in modern jewellers' technicality call *répoussé* work, each of which bore on its top, like a flower on its stalk, a shallow cup filled with oil, in which a wick floated. There were thus seven lamps in all, including that on the central stem. The material was costly, the work adorning it was artistic, the oil with which it was fed was carefully prepared, the number of its lamps expressed perfection, it was daily trimmed by the priest, and there, all through the night, it burned, the one spot of light in a dark desert.

Now, this Inner Court of the Tabernacle or Temple was intended, with its furniture, to be symbolical of the life of Israel, the priestly nation. The Altar of Incense, which was the main article of ecclesiastical equipment there, and stood in the central place, represented the life of Israel in its Godward aspect, as being a life of continual devotion. The Candlestick on the one hand, and the Table of Shew-bread on the other, were likewise symbolical of other aspects of that same life. I have to deal now with the meaning and lessons of this golden lampstand, and it teaches us—

I. The office manwards of the Church and of the individual Christian.

Let me just for a moment recall the various instances in which this symbol reappears in Scripture. We have, in the vision of the prophet who sustained and animated the spirits of Israel in their Restoration, the repetition of the emblem, in the great golden candlestick which Zechariah saw, fed by two 'olive trees,' one on either side of it; and in the last book of

Scripture we have that most significant and lovely variation of it, the reappearance, not of the *one* golden candlestick or lampstand, but of *seven*. The formal unity is at an end, but the seven constitute a better, more vital unity, because Christ is in the midst. We may learn the lesson that the Christian conception of the oneness of the Church towers above the Jewish conception of the oneness of Israel by all the difference that there is between a mere mechanical, external unity, and a vital oneness—because all are partakers of the one Christ. I may recall, also, how our Lord, in that great programme of the Kingdom which Matthew has gathered together in what we call ‘the Sermon on the Mount,’ immediately after the Beatitudes, goes on to speak of the office of His people under the two metaphors of ‘the salt of the earth’ and ‘the light of the world,’ and immediately connects with the latter of the two a reference to a lamp lit and set upon its stand; and clinches the whole by the exhortation, ‘Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven.’

A remarkable and beautiful variation of that exhortation is found in one of the Apostolic writings when Paul, instead of saying, ‘Ye are the light of the world,’ says, ‘Shine as lights in the world,’ and so gives us the individual, as well as the collective and ecclesiastical, aspect of these great functions. That is a hint that is very much needed. Christian people are quite willing to admit that the Church, the abstraction, the generalisation, is ‘the light of the world.’ But they are woefully apt to slip their own necks out from under the yoke of the obligation, and to forget that the collective light is only the product of

the millions of individual lights rushing together—just as in some gas-lights you have a whole series of minute punctures, each of which gives out its own little jet of radiance, and all run together into one brilliant circle. So do not let us escape the personal pressure of this office, or lay it all on the broad shoulders of that generalised abstraction ‘the Church.’ But, since the collective light is but the product of the individual small shinings, let us take the two lessons: first, contribute our part to the general lustre; second, be content with having our part lost in the general light.

But now let me turn for a little while to the more specific meaning of this symbol. The life which, by the central position of the Altar of Incense, was symbolised as being centrally, essentially in its depths and primarily, a life of habitual devotion and communion with God, in its manward aspect is a life that shines ‘to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.’ That is the solemn obligation, the ideal function, of the Christian Church and of each individual who professes to belong to it. Now, if you recur to our Lord’s own application of this metaphor, to which I have already referred, you will see that the first and foremost way by which Christian communities and individuals discharge this function is by conduct. ‘Let your light so shine before men’—that they may hear your eloquent proclamation of the Gospel? No! ‘Let your light so shine before men’—that you may convince the gainsayers by argument, or move the hard-hearted by appeals and exhortations; that you may preach and talk? No! ‘That *they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven.*’ We may say of the Christian community, and of the Christian individual,

with all reverence, what the Scripture in an infinitely deeper and more sacred sense says of Jesus Christ Himself, 'the life was the light.' It is conduct, whereby most effectually, most universally, and with the least risk of rousing antagonism and hostile feelings, Christian people may 'shine as lights in the world.' For we all know how the inconsistencies of a Christian man block the path of the Gospel far more than a hundred sermons or talks further it. We all know how there are people, plenty of them, who, however illogically yet most naturally, compare our lives in their daily action with our professed beliefs, and, saying to themselves, 'I do not see that there is much difference between them and me,' draw the conclusion that it matters very little whether a man is a Christian or not, seeing that the conduct of the men who profess to be so is little more radiant, bright with purity and knowledge and joy, than is the conduct of others. Dear brethren, you can do far more to help or hinder the spread of Christ's Kingdom by the way in which you do common things, side by side with men who are not partakers of the 'like precious faith' with yourselves, than I or my fellow-preachers can do by all our words. It is all very well to lecture about the efficiency of a machine; let us see it at work, and that will convince people. We preach; but you preach far more eloquently, and far more effectively, by your lives. 'In all labour,' says the Book of Proverbs, 'there is profit'—which we may divert from its original meaning to signify that in all Christian living there is force to attract—'but the talk of the lips tendeth only to poverty.' Oh! if the Christian men and women of England would live their Christianity, they would do more to convert the unconverted, and

to draw in the outcasts, than all of us preachers can do. 'From you,' said the Apostle once to a church very young, and just rescued from the evils of heathenism—'from you sounded out,' as if blown from a trumpet, 'the Word of the Lord, so that we need not to speak anything.' Live the life, and thereby you diffuse the light.

Nor need we forget that this most potent of all weapons is one that can be wielded by all Christian people. Our gifts differ. Some of us cannot speak for Jesus; some of us who think we can had often better hold our tongues. But we can all live like and for Him. And this most potent and universally diffused possibility is also the weapon that can be wielded with least risk of failure. There is a certain assumption, which it is often difficult to swallow, in a Christian man's addressing another on the understanding that he, the speaker, possesses something which the other lacks. By words we may often repel, and often find that the ears that we seek to enter with our message close themselves against us and are unwilling to hear. But there is no chance of offending anybody, or of repelling anybody, by living Christlike. We can all do that, and it is the largest contribution that any of us can make to the collective light which shines out from the Christian Church.

But, brethren, we have to remember that there are dangers attending the life that reveals its hidden principles as being faith in Christ and obedience to Him. Did you ever notice how, in the Sermon on the Mount, there are two sets of precepts which seem diametrically opposite to one another? There is a whole series of illustrations of the one commandment, 'Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before

men, to be seen of them,' and then there is the precept, 'Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works.' So that whilst, on the one hand, there is to be the manifestation in daily conduct of the inner principles that animate us, on the other hand, if there comes in the least taint or trace of ostentation, everything is spoiled, and the light is darkness. The light of the sun makes all things visible and hides itself. We do not see the sunbeams, but we see what the sunbeams illuminate. It is the coarser kinds of light which are themselves separately visible, and they are so only because they have not power enough to make everything around them as brilliant as they themselves are. So our light is to be silent, our light is—if I might use such a phrase—to hide itself in 'a glorious privacy,' whilst it enables men to see, even through our imperfect ministration, the face of our Father in Heaven.

But let me remind you that the same variation by Paul of our Lord's words to which I have already referred as bringing out the difference between the collective and the individual function, also brings out another difference; for Paul says, 'Ye shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life.' He slightly varies the metaphor. We are no longer regarded as being ourselves illuminants, but simply as being the stands on which the light is placed. And that means that whilst the witness by life is the mightiest, the most universally possible, and the least likely to offend, there must also be, as occasion shall serve, without cowardice, without shamefaced reticence, the proclamation of the great Gospel which has made us 'lights in the world.' And that is a function which every Christian man can discharge too, though I have



just been saying that they cannot all preach and speak; for every Christian soul has some other soul to whom its word comes with a force that none other can have.

So the one office that is set forth here is the old familiar one, the obligation of which is fully recognised by us all, and pitifully ill-discharged by any of us, to shine by our daily life, and to shine by the actual communication by speech of 'the Name that is above every name.' That is the ideal; alas for the reality! 'Ye are the light of the world.' What kind of light do we—the Church of Christ that gathers here—ray out into the darkness of Manchester? Socially, intellectually, morally, in the civic life, in the national life, are Christian people in the van? They ought to be. There is a church clock in our city which has a glass dial that professes to be illuminated at night, so that the passer-by may tell the hour; but it is generally burning so dimly that nobody can see on its grimy face what o'clock it is. That is like a great many of our churches, and I ask you to ask yourselves whether it is like you or not—a dark lantern, a most imperfectly illuminated dial, which gives no guidance and no information to anybody.

This golden lampstand teaches us—

II. How this office is to be discharged.

Remember simply these two points. It stood, as I have already said, on one side of the Altar of Incense which was central to everything. It was daily tended by the priests, and fed with fresh oil. Hence we may derive some important practical lessons.

To begin with, we note that our light is a derived light, and therefore can only be kept bright when we keep close to the source from whence it is derived.

'That was the true Light, which coming into the world lighteth every man'—there is the source of all illumination, in Jesus Christ Himself. He alone is *the* Light, and as for all others we must say of them what was said of His great forerunner, 'Not that light, but sent to bear witness of that light'; and again, 'he was a light kindled,' and therefore 'shining,' and so his shining was but 'for a season.' But Jesus is for ever the light of the world, and all our illumination comes from Him. As Paul says, 'Now are ye light in the Lord,' therefore only in the measure in which we are 'in the Lord,' shall we be light. Keep near to Him and you will shine; break the connection with Him, and you are darkness, darkness for yourselves, and darkness for the world. Switch off, and the light is darkness.

Change the metaphor, and instead of saying 'derived light' say 'reflected light.' *There* is a pane of glass in a cottage, miles away across the moor. It was invisible a moment ago, and suddenly it gleams like a diamond. Why? The sun has struck it; and in a moment after it will be invisible again. As long as Jesus Christ is shining on my heart, so long, and not a moment longer, shall I give forth the light that will illumine the world. Astronomers have a contrivance by which they can keep a photographic film on which they are seeking to get the image of a star, moving along with the movement of the heavens, so that on the same spot the star shall always shine. We have to keep ourselves steady beneath the white beam from Jesus, and then we, too, shall be 'light in the Lord.'

Our light is fed light. Daily came the priest, daily the oil that had been exhausted by shining was replenished. We all know what that oil means and is;

the Divine Spirit which comes into every heart which is open by faith in Christ, and which abides in every heart where there are desire, obedience, and the following of Him; which can be quenched by my sin, by my negligence, by my ceasing to wish it, by my not using its gifts when I have them; which can be grieved by my inconsistencies, and by the spots of darkness that so often take up more of the sphere of my life than the spots of illumination. But we can have as much of that oil of the Divine Spirit, the 'unction from the Holy One,' as we desire, and expect, and use. And unless we have, dear brethren, there is no shining for us. This generation in its abundant activities tends to a Christianity which has more spindles than power, which is more surface than depth, which is so anxious to do service that it forgets the preliminary of all right service, patient, solitary, silent communion with God. Suffer the word of exhortation—let shining be second, let replenishing with the oil be first. First the Altar of Incense, then the Candlestick.

III. This golden lampstand tells us of the fatal effect of neglecting the Church's and the individual's duty.

Where is the seven-branched candlestick of the second Temple? No one knows. Possibly, according to one statement, it lies at the bottom of the Mediterranean. Certainly we know that it is pictured on that sad panel in the conqueror's arch at Rome, and that it became a trophy of the insolent victor. It disappeared, and the Israel whom it vainly endeavoured through the centuries to stir to a consciousness of its vocation, has never since had a gleam of light to ray out into the world. Where are the seven candlesticks, which made a blessed unity because Christ walked in their midst? Where are the churches of Ephesus, Smyrna,

Philadelphia, Thyatira, and the rest? Where they stood the mosque is reared, and from its minaret day by day rings out—not the proclamation of the Name, but—‘There is no God but God, and Mahomet is His Prophet.’ The Pharos that ought to have shone out over stormy seas has been seized by wreckers, and its light is blinded, and false lights lure the mariner to the shoals and to shipwreck.

‘Take heed lest He also spare not thee.’ O brethren! is it not a bitter irony to call *us* ‘lights of the world’? Let us penitently recognise the inconsistencies of our lives, and the reticence of our speech. Let us not lose sight of the high ideal, that we may the more penitently recognise the miserable falling short of our reality. And let us be thankful that *the* Priest is tending the lamps. ‘He will not quench the smoking wick,’ but will replenish it with oil, and fan the dying flame. Only let us not resist His ministrations, which are always gentle, even when He removes the charred blacknesses that hinder our being what we should be, and may be, if we will—lights of the world. ‘Arise! shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.’

### THE NAMES ON AARON'S BREASTPLATE

‘Aaron shall bear their names before the Lord, upon his two shoulders, for a memorial. . . . And Aaron shall bear the names of the Children of Israel in the breastplate of judgment upon his heart, when he goeth in unto the Holy Place.’—EXODUS xxviii. 12, 29.

EVERY part of the elaborately prescribed dress of the high priest was significant. But the significance of the whole was concentrated in the inscription upon his

mitre, 'Holiness to the Lord,' and in those others upon his breastplate and his shoulder.

The breastplate was composed of folded cloth, in which were lodged twelve precious stones, in four rows of three, each stone containing the name of one of the tribes. It was held in position by the ephod, which consisted of another piece of cloth, with a back and front part, which were united into one on the shoulders. On each shoulder it was clasped by an onyx stone bearing the names of six of the tribes. Thus twice, on the shoulders, the seat of power, and on the heart, the organ of thought and of love, Aaron, entering into the presence of the Most High, bore 'the names of the tribes for a memorial continually.'

Now, I think we shall not be indulging in the very dangerous amusement of unduly spiritualising the externalities of that old law if we see here, in these two things, some very important lessons.

I. The first one that I would suggest to you is—here we have the expression of the great truth of representation of the people by the priest.

The names of the tribes laid upon Aaron's heart and on his shoulders indicated the significance of his office—that he represented Israel before God, as truly as he represented God to Israel. For the moment the personality of the official was altogether melted away and absorbed in the sanctity of his function, and he stood before God as the individualised nation. Aaron was Israel, and Israel was Aaron, for the purposes of worship. And that was indicated by the fact that here, on the shoulders from which, according to an obvious symbol, all acts of power emanate, and on the heart from which, according to most natural metaphor, all the outgoings of the personal life proceed, were

written the names of the tribes. That meant, 'This man standing here is the Israel of God, the concentrated nation.'

The same thought works the other way. The nation is the diffused priest, and all its individual components are consecrated to God. All this was external ceremonial, with no real spiritual fact at the back of it. But it pointed onwards to something that is not ceremonial. It pointed to this, that the true priest must, in like manner, gather up into himself, and in a very profound sense be, the people for whom he is the priest; and that they, in their turn, by the action of their own minds and hearts and wills, must consent to and recognise that representative relation, which comes to the solemn height of identification in Christ's relation to His people. 'I am the Vine, ye are the branches,' says He, and also, 'That they all may be one in us as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee.' So Paul says, 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.' 'The life which I live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God.'

So Christ gathers us all, if we will let Him, into Himself; and our lives may be hid with Him—in a fashion that is more than mere external and formal representation, or as people have a member of Parliament to represent them in the councils of the nation—even in a true union with Him in whom is the life of all of us, if we live in any real sense. Aaron bore the names of the tribes on shoulder and heart, and Israel was Aaron, and Aaron was Israel.

II. Further, we see here, in these eloquent symbols, the true significance of intercession.

Now, that is a word and a thought which has been woefully limited and made shallow and superficial by

the unfortunate confining of the expression, in our ordinary language, to a mere action by speech. Intercession is supposed to be verbal asking for some good to be bestowed on, or some evil to be averted from, some one in whom we are interested. But the Old Testament notion of the priest's intercession, and the New Testament use of the word which we so render, go far beyond any verbal utterances, and reach to the very heart of things. Intercession, in the true sense of the word, means the doing of any act whatsoever before God for His people by Jesus Christ. Whenever, as in the presence of God, He brings to God anything which is His, that is intercession. He undertakes for them, not by words only, though His mighty word is, 'I will that they whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am,' but by acts which are more than even the words of the Incarnate Word.

If we take these two inscriptions upon which I am now commenting, we shall get, I think, what covers the whole ground of the intercession on which Christians are to repose their souls. For, with regard to the one of them, we read that the high priest's breastplate was named 'the breastplate of judgment'; and what that means is explained by the last words of the verse following that from which my text is taken: 'Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel upon his heart before the Lord.' Judgment means a judicial sentence; in this case a judicial sentence of acquittal. And that Aaron stood before God in the Holy Place, ministering with this breastplate upon his heart, is explained by the writer of these regulations to mean that he carried there the visible manifestation of Israel's acquittal, based upon his own sacrificial function. Now, put that into plain

English, and it is just this—Jesus Christ's sacrifice ensures, for all those whose names are written on these gems on His heart, their acquittal in the judgment of Heaven. Or, in other words, the first step in the intercession of our great High Priest is the presenting before God for ever and ever that great fact that He, the Sinless, has died for the love of sinful men, and thereby has secured that the judgment of Heaven on them shall now be 'no condemnation.' Brethren, there is the root of all our hope in Christ, and of all that Christ is to individuals and to society—the assurance that the breastplate of judgment is on His heart, as a sign that all who trust Him are acquitted by the tribunal of Heaven.

The other side of this great continual act of intercession is set forth by the other symbol—the names written on the shoulders, the seat of power. There is a beautiful parallel, which yet at first sight does not seem to be one, to the thought that lies here, in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, where, addressing the restored and perfected Israel, he says, speaking in the person of Jehovah: 'I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands.' That has precisely the same meaning that I take to be conveyed by this symbol in the text. The names of the tribes are written on His shoulders; and not until that arm is wearied or palsied, not till that strong hand forgets its cunning, will our defence fail. If our names are thus written on the seat of power, that means that all the divine authority and omnipotence which Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son of the Father, wields in His state of royal glory, are exercised on behalf of, or at all events on the side of, those whose names He thus bears upon His shoulders. That is the guarantee for each of us that our hands



shall be made strong, according to the ancient prophetic blessing, 'by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob.' Just as a father or a mother will take their child's little tremulous hand in theirs and hold it, that it may be strengthened for some small task beyond its unbacked, uninvigorated power; so Jesus Christ will give us strength within, and also will order the march of His Providence and send the gift of His Spirit, for the succour and the strengthening of all whose names are written on His ephod. He has gone within the veil. He has left us heavy tasks, but our names are on His shoulders, and we 'can do all things in Christ who strengtheneth us.'

III. Still further, this symbol suggests to us the depth and reality of Christ's sympathy.

The heart is, in our language, the seat of love. It is not so in the Old Testament. Affection is generally allocated to another part of the frame; but here the heart stands for the organ of care, of thought, of interest. For, according to the Old Testament view of the relation between man's body and man's soul, the very seat and centre of the individual life is in the heart. I suppose that was because it was known that, somehow or other, the blood came thence. Be that as it may, the thought is clear throughout all the Old Testament that the heart is the man, and the man is the heart. And so, if Jesus bears our names upon His heart, that does not express merely representation nor merely intercession, but it expresses also personal regard, individualising knowledge. For Aaron wore not one great jewel with 'Israel' written on it, but twelve little ones, with 'Dan,' 'Benjamin,' and 'Ephraim,' and all the rest of them, each on his own gem.

So we can say, 'Such a High Priest became us, who could have compassion upon the ignorant, and upon them that are out of the way'; and we can fall back on that old-fashioned but inexhaustible source of consolation and strength: 'In all their affliction He was afflicted'; and though the noise of the tempests which toss us can scarcely be supposed to penetrate into the veiled place where He dwells on high, yet we may be sure—and take all the peace and consolation and encouragement out of it that it is meant to give us—that 'we have not a High Priest that cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities,' but that Himself, having known miseries, 'is able to succour them that are tempted.' Our names are on Christ's heart.

IV. Then, lastly, we have here a suggestion of how precious to Aaron Israel is.

Jewels were chosen to symbolise the tribes. Bits of tin, potsherds, or anything else that one could have scratched letters upon, would have done quite as well. But 'the precious things of the everlasting mountains' were chosen to bear the dear names. 'The Lord's portion is His people'; and precious in the eyes of Christ are the souls for whom He has given so much. They are not only precious, but lustrous, flashing back the light in various colours indeed, according to their various laws of crystallisation, but all receptive of it and all reflective of it. I said that the names on the breastplate of judgment expressed the acquittal and acceptance of Israel. But does Christ's work for us stop with simple acquittal? Oh no! 'Whom He justified them He also glorified.' And if our souls are 'bound in the bundle of life,' and our names are written on the heart of the Christ, be sure that mere forgiveness and acquittal is the least of the blessings which He intends to give, and

that He will not be satisfied until in all our nature we receive and flash back the light of His own glory.

It is very significant in this aspect that the names of the twelve tribes are described as being written on the precious stones which make the walls of the New Jerusalem. Thus borne on Christ's heart whilst He is within the veil and we are in the outer courts, we may hope to be carried by His sustaining and perfecting hand into the glories, and be made participant of the glories. Let us see to it that we write His name on our hearts, on their cares, their thought, their love, and on our hands, on their toiling and their possessing; and then, God helping us, and Christ dwelling in us, we shall come to the blessed state of those who serve Him, and bear His name flaming conspicuous for ever on their foreheads.

### **THREE INSCRIPTIONS WITH ONE MEANING**

'Thou shalt make a plate of pure gold, and grave upon it . . . HOLINESS TO THE LORD.'—EXODUS xxviii. 36.

'In that day there shall be upon the bells of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD.'—ZECH. xiv. 20.

'His name shall be in their foreheads.'—REV. xxii. 4.

YOU will have perceived my purpose in putting these three widely separated texts together. They all speak of inscriptions, and they are all obviously connected with each other. The first of them comes from the ancient times of the institution of the ceremonial ritual, and describes a part of the high priest's official dress. In his mitre was a thin plate of gold on which was written, 'Holiness to the Lord.' The second of them comes from almost the last portion recorded of the history of Israel in the Old Testament, and is from

the words of the great Prophet of the Restoration—his ideal presentation of the Messianic period, in which he recognises as one feature, that the inscription on the mitre of the high priest shall be written on ‘the bells of the horses.’ And the last of them is from the closing vision of the celestial kingdom, the heavenly and perfected form of the Christian Church. John, probably remembering the high priest and his mitre, with its inscription upon the forehead, says: ‘His servants shall do Him priestly service’—for that is the meaning of the word inadequately translated ‘serve Him’—‘and see His face, and His name shall be in their foreheads.’

These three things, then—the high priest’s mitre, the horses’ bells, the foreheads of the perfected saints—present three aspects of the Christian thought of holiness. Take them one by one.

#### I. The high priest’s mitre.

The high priest was the official representative of the nation. He stood before God as the embodied and personified Israel. For the purposes of worship Israel was the high priest, and the high priest was Israel. And so, on his forehead, not to distinguish him from the rest of the people, but to include all the people in his consecration, shone a golden plate with the motto, ‘Holiness to the Lord.’ So, at the very beginning of Jewish ritual there stands a protest against all notions that make ‘saint’ the designation of any abnormal or exceptional sanctity, and confine the name to the members of any selected aristocracy of devoutness and goodness. All Christian men, *ex officio*, by the very fact of their Christianity, are saints, in the true sense of the word. And the representative of the whole of Israel stood there before God, with this inscription blazing on

his forehead, as a witness that, whatsoever holiness may be, it belongs to every member of the true Israel.

And what is it? It is a very unfortunate thing—indicating superficiality of thought—that the modern popular notion of ‘holiness’ identifies it with purity, righteousness, moral perfection. Now that idea *is* in it, but is not the whole of it. For, not to spend time upon mere remarks on words, the meaning of the word thus rendered is in Hebrew, as well as in Greek and in our own English, one and the same. The root-meaning is ‘separated,’ ‘set apart,’ and the word expresses primarily, not moral character, but relation to God. That makes all the difference; and it incalculably deepens the conception, as well as puts us on the right track for understanding the only possible means by which there can ever be realised that moral perfection and excellence which has unfortunately monopolised the meaning of the word in most people’s minds. The first thought is ‘set apart to God.’ That is holiness, in its root and germ.

And how can we be set apart for God? You may devote a dead thing for certain uses easily enough. How can a man be separated and laid aside?

Well, there is only one way, brethren, and that is by self-surrender. ‘Yield yourselves to God’ is but the other side, or, rather, the practical shape, of the Old and the New Testament doctrine of holiness. A man becomes God’s when he says, ‘Lord, take me and mould me, and fill me and cleanse me, and do with me what Thou wilt.’ In that self-surrender, which is the tap-root of all holiness, the first and foremost thing to be offered is that most obstinate of all, the will that is in us. And when we yield our wills in submission both to commandments and providences,

both to gifts and to withdrawals, both to gains and to losses, both to joys and to sorrows, then we begin to write upon our foreheads 'Holiness to the Lord.' And when we go on to yield our hearts to Him, by enshrining Him sole and sovereign in their innermost chamber, and turning to Him the whole current of our lives and desires, and hopes and confidences, which we are so apt to allow to run to waste and be sucked up in the desert sands of the world, then we write more of that inscription. And when we fill our minds with joyful submission to His truth, and occupy our thoughts with His mighty Name and His great revelation, and carry Him with us in the hidden corners of our consciousness, even whilst we are busy about daily work, then we add further letters to it. And when the submissive will, and the devoted heart, and the occupied thoughts are fully expressed in daily life and its various external duties, then the writing is complete. 'Holiness to the Lord' is self-surrender of will and heart and mind and everything. And that surrender is of the very essence of Christianity.

What is a saint? Some man or woman that has practised unheard-of austerities? Somebody that has lived an isolated and self-regarding life in convent or monastery or desert? No! a man or woman in the world who, moved by the mercies of God, yields self to God as 'a living sacrifice.'

So the New Testament writers never hesitate to speak even of such very imperfect Christians as were found in abundance in churches like Corinth and Galatia as being all 'saints,' every man of them. That is not because the writers were minimising their defects, or idealising their persons, but because, if they are Christians at all, they are saints; seeing that no

man is a Christian who has not been drawn by Christ's great sacrifice for him to yield himself a sacrifice for Christ.

Of course that intrusive idea which has, in popular apprehension, so swallowed up the notion of holiness—viz. that of perfection of moral character or conduct—is included in this other, or rather is developed from it. For the true way to conquer self is to surrender self; and the more entire our giving up of ourselves, the more certainly shall we receive ourselves back again from His hands. 'By the mercies of God, I beseech you, yield yourselves living sacrifices.'

II. I come to my next text—the horses' bells.

Zechariah has a vision of the ideal Messianic times, and, of course, as must necessarily be the case, his picture is painted with colours laid upon his palette by his experience, and he depicts that distant future in the guise suggested to him by what he saw around him. So we have to disentangle from his words the sentiment which he expresses, and to recognise the symbolic way in which he puts it. His thought is this,—the inscription on the high priest's mitre will be written on the bells which ornament the harness of the horses, which in Israel were never used as with us, but only either for war or for pomp and display, and the use of which was always regarded with a certain kind of doubt and suspicion. Even these shall be consecrated in that far-off day.

And then he goes on with variations on the same air, 'In that day there shall be upon the bells of the horses, "Holiness unto the Lord,"' and adds that 'the pots in the Lord's house'—the humble vessels that were used for the most ordinary parts of the Temple services—'shall be like the bowls before the altar,'

into which the sacred blood of the offerings was poured. The most external and secular thing bearing upon religion shall be as sacred as the sacredest. But that is not all. 'Yea! every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the Lord of hosts, and all they that sacrifice shall come and take of them,' and put their offerings therein. That is to say, the coarse pottery vessels that were in every poverty-stricken house in the city shall be elevated to the rank of the sacred vessels of the Temple. Domestic life with all its secularities shall be hallowed. The kitchens of Jerusalem shall be as truly places of worship as is the inner shrine of the Most High.

On the whole, the prophet's teaching is that, in the ideal state of man upon earth, there will be an entire abolition of the distinction between 'sacred' and 'secular'; a distinction that has wrought infinite mischief in the world, and in the lives of Christian people.

Let me translate these words of our prophet into English equivalents. Every cup and tumbler in a poor man's kitchen may be as sacred as the communion chalice that passes from lip to lip with the 'blood of Jesus Christ' in it. Every common piece of service that we do, down among the vulgarities and the secularities and the meannesses of daily life, may be lifted up to stand upon precisely the same level as the sacredest office that we undertake. The bells of the horses may jingle to the same tune as the trumpets of the priests sounded within the shrine, and on all, great and small, may be written, 'Holiness to the Lord.'

But let us remember that that universally diffused sanctity will need to have a centre of diffusion, else there will be no diffusion, and that all life will become



sacred when the man that lives it has 'Holiness to the Lord' written on his forehead, and not else. If that be the inscription on the driver's heart, the horses that he drives will have it written on their bells, but they will not have it unless it be. Holy men make all things holy. 'To the pure all things are pure,' but unto them that are unclean and disobedient there is nothing pure. Hallow thyself, and all things are clean unto thee.

III. And so I come to my third text—the perfected saints' foreheads.

The connection between the first and the last of these texts is as plain and close as between the first and the second. For John in his closing vision gives emphasis to the priestly idea as designating in its deepest relations the redeemed and perfected Christian Church. Therefore he says, as I have already explained, 'His servants shall do Him *priestly* service, and His name shall be in their foreheads.' The old official dress of the high priest comes into his mind, and he paints the future, just as Zechariah did, under the forms of the past, and sees before the throne the perfected saints, each man of them with that inscription clear and conspicuous.

But there is an advance in his words which I think it is not fanciful to note. It is only the *name* that is written in the perfected saint's forehead. Not the 'Holiness unto the Lord,' but just the bare name. What does that mean? Well, it means the same as your writing your name in one of your books does, or as when a man puts his initials on the back of his oxen, or as the old practice of branding the master's mark upon the slave did. It means absolute ownership.

But it means something more. The name is the manifested personality, the revealed God, or, as we say in an abstract way, the character of God. That Name is to be in the foreheads of His perfected people. How does it come to be there? Read also the clause before the text—‘His servants shall see His face, and His name shall be in their foreheads.’ That is to say, the perfected condition is not reached by surrender only, but by assimilation; and that assimilation comes by contemplation. The faces that are turned to Him, and behold Him, are smitten with the light and shine, and those that look upon them see ‘as it had been the face of an angel,’ as the Sanhedrim saw that of Stephen, when he beheld the Son of Man ‘standing at the right hand of God.’

My last text is but a picturesque way of saying what the writer of it says in plain words when he declares, ‘We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.’ The name is to be ‘in their foreheads,’ where every eye can see it. Alas! alas! it is so hard for us to live out our best selves, and to show to the world what is in us. Cowardice, sheepishness, and a hundred other reasons prevent it. In this poor imperfect state no emotion ever takes shape and visibility without losing more or less of its beauty. But yonder the obstructions to self-manifestation will be done away; and ‘when He shall be manifested, we also shall be manifested with Him in glory.’

‘Then shall the righteous blaze forth like the sun in My heavenly Father’s Kingdom.’ But the beginning of it all is ‘Holiness to the Lord’ written on our hearts; and the end of that is the vision which is impossible without holiness, and which leads on to the beholder’s perfect likeness to his Lord.

## THE ALTAR OF INCENSE

Thou shalt make an altar to burn incense upon.'—EXODUS xxx. 1.

CEREMONIES are embodied thoughts. Religious ceremonies are moulded by, and seek to express, the worshipper's conception of his God, and his own relation to Him; his aspirations and his need. Of late years scholars have been busy studying the religions of the more backward races, and explaining rude and repulsive rites by pointing to the often profound and sometimes beautiful ideas underlying them. When that process is applied to Australian and Fijian savages, it is honoured as a new and important study; when we apply it to the Mosaic Ritual it is pooh-pooed as 'foolish spiritualising.' Now, no doubt, there has been a great deal of nonsense talked in regard to this matter, and a great deal of ingenuity wasted in giving a Christian meaning—or, may I say, a Christian twist?—to every pin of the Tabernacle, and every detail of the ritual. Of course, to exaggerate a truth is the surest way to discredit a truth, but the truth remains true all the same, and underneath that elaborate legislation, which makes such wearisome and profitless reading for the most of us, in the Pentateuch, there lie, if we can only grasp them, great thoughts and lessons that we shall all be the better for pondering.

To one item of these, this altar of incense, I call attention now, because it is rich in suggestions, and leads us into very sacred regions of the Christian life which are by no means so familiar to many of us as they ought to be. Let me just for one moment state the facts with which I wish to deal. The Jewish

Tabernacle, and subsequently the Temple, were arranged in three compartments: the outermost court, which was accessible to all the people; the second, which was trodden by the priests alone; and the third, where the Shechinah dwelt in solitude, broken only once a year by the foot of the High Priest. That second court we are concerned with now. There are three pieces of ecclesiastical furniture in it: an altar in the centre, flanked on either side by a great lampstand, and a table on which were piled loaves. It is to that central piece of furniture that I ask your attention now, and to the thoughts that underlie it, and the lessons that it teaches.

I. This altar shows us what prayer is.

Suppose we had been in that court when in the morning or in the evening the priest came with the glowing pan of coals from another altar in the outer court, and laid it on this altar, and heaped upon it the sticks of incense, we should have seen the curling, fragrant wreaths ascending till 'the House was filled with smoke,' as a prophet once saw it. We should not have wanted any interpreter to tell us what that meant. What could that rising cloud of sweet odours signify but the ascent of the soul towards God? Put that into more abstract words, and it is just the old, hackneyed commonplace which I seek to try to freshen a little now, that incense is the symbol of prayer. That that is so is plain enough, not only from the natural propriety of the case, but because you find the identification distinctly stated in several places in Scripture, of which I quote but two instances. In one psalm we read, 'Let my prayer come before Thee as incense.' In the Book of the Apocalypse we read of 'golden bowls full of odours, which are the prayers of

saints.' And that the symbolism was understood by, and modified the practice of, the nation, we are taught when we read that whilst Zechariah the priest was within the court offering incense, as it was his lot to do, 'the whole multitude of the people were without praying,' doing that which the priest within the court symbolised by his offering. So then we come to this, dear friends, that we fearfully misunderstand and limit the nobleness and the essential character of prayer when, as we are always tempted to do by our inherent self-regard, we make petition its main feature and form. Of course, so long as we are what we shall always be in this world, needy and sinful creatures; and so long as we are what we shall ever be in all worlds, creatures absolutely dependent for life and everything on the will and energy of God, petition must necessarily be a very large part of prayer. But the more we grow into His likeness, and the more we understand the large privileges and the glorious possibilities which lie in prayer, the more will the relative proportions of its component parts be changed, and petition will become less, and aspiration will become more. The essence of prayer, the noblest form of it, is thus typified by the cloud of sweet odours that went up before God.

In all true prayer there must be the lowest prostration in reverence before the Infinite Majesty. But the noblest prayer is that which lifts 'them that are bowed down' rather than that which prostrates men before an inaccessible Deity. And so, whilst we lie low at His feet, that may be the prayer of a mere theist, but when our hearts go out towards Him, and we are drawn to Himself, that is the prayer that befits Christian aspiration; the ascent of the soul toward God is the true

essence of prayer. As one of the non-Christian philosophers—seekers after God, if ever there were such, and who, I doubt not, found Him whom they sought—has put it, ‘the flight of the lonely soul to the only God’; that is prayer. Is that my prayer? We come to Him many a time burdened with some very real sorrow, or weighted with some pressing responsibility, and we should not be true to ourselves, or to Him, if our prayer did not take the shape of petition. But, as we pray, the blessing of the transformation of its character should be realised by us, and that which began with the cry for help and deliverance should always be, and it always will be, if the cry for help and deliverance has been of the right sort, sublimed into ‘Thy face, Lord, will I seek.’ The Book of Ecclesiastes describes death as the ‘return of the spirit to God who gave it.’ That is the true description of prayer, a going back to the fountain’s source. Flames aspire; to the place ‘whence the rivers came thither they return again.’ The homing pigeon or the migrating bird goes straight through many degrees of latitude, and across all sorts of weather, to the place whence it came. Ah! brethren, let us ask ourselves if our spirits thus aspire and soar. Do we know what it is to be, if I might so say, like those captive balloons that are ever yearning upwards, and stretching to the loftiest point permitted them by the cord that tethers them to earth?

Now another thought that this altar of incense may teach us is that the prayer that soars must be kindled. There is no fragrance in a stick of incense lying there. No wreaths of ascending smoke come from it. It has to be kindled before its sweet odour can be set free and ascend. That is why so much of our prayer is of no delight to God, and of no benefit to us, because it is not

on fire with the flame of a heart kindled into love and thankfulness by the great sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The cold vapours lie like a winding-sheet down in the valleys until the sun smites them, warms them, and draws them up. And our desires will hover in the low levels, and be dank and damp, until they are drawn up to the heights by the warmth of the Sun of righteousness. Oh! brethren, the formality and the coldness, to say nothing of the inconsecutiveness and the interruptedness by rambling thoughts that we all know in our petitions, in our aspirations, are only to be cured in one way:—

‘Come! shed abroad a Saviour’s love,  
And that will kindle ours.’

It is the stretched string that gives out musical notes; the slack one is dumb. And if we desire that we may be able to be sure, as our Master was, when He said, ‘I know that Thou hearest me always,’ we must pray as He did, of whom it is recorded that ‘He prayed the more earnestly,’ and ‘was heard in that He feared.’ The word rendered ‘the more earnestly’ carries in it a metaphor drawn from that very fact that I have referred to. It means ‘with the more stretched-out extension and intensity.’ If our prayers are to be heard as music in heaven, they must come from a stretched string.

Once more, this altar of incense teaches us that kindled prayer delights God. That emblem of the sweet odour is laid hold of with great boldness by more than one Old and New Testament writer, in order to express the marvellous thought that there is a mutual joy in the prayer of faith and love, and that it rises as ‘an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God.’ The cuneiform inscriptions give that

thought with characteristic vividness and grossness when they speak about the gods being 'gathered like flies round the steam of the sacrifice.' We have the same thought, freed from all its grossness, when we think that the curling wreaths going up from a heart aspiring and enflamed, come to Him as a sweet odour, and delight His soul. People say, 'that is anthropomorphism—making God too like a man.' Well, man is like God, at any rate, and surely the teaching of that great name 'Father' carries with it the assurance that just as fathers of flesh are glad when they see that their children like best to be with them, so there is something analogous in that joy before the angels of heaven which the Father has, not only because of the prodigal who comes back, but because of the child who has long been with Him, and is ever seeking to nestle closer to His heart. The Psalmist was lost in wonder and thankfulness that he was able to say 'He was extolled with my tongue.' Surely it should be a gracious, encouraging, strengthening thought to us all, that even our poor aspirations may minister to the divine gladness.

Now let us turn to another thought.

II. This altar shows us where prayer stands in the Christian life.

There are two or three points in regard to its position which it is no fanciful spiritualising, but simply grasping the underlying meaning of the institution, if we emphasise. First, let me remind you that there was another altar in the outer court, whereon was offered the daily sacrifice for the sins of the people. That altar came first, and the sacrifice had to be offered on it first, before the priest came into the inner court with the coals from that altar, and the incense kindled



by them. What does that say to us? The altar of incense is not approached until we have been to the altar of sacrifice. It is no mere arbitrary appointment, nor piece of evangelical narrowness, which says that there is no real access to God, in all the fullness and reality of His revealed character for us sinful men, until our sins have been dealt with, taken away by the Lamb of God, sacrificed for us. And it is simply the transcript of experience which declares that there will be little inclination or desire to come to God with the sacrifice of praise and prayer until we have been to Christ, the sacrifice of propitiation and pardon. Brethren, we need to be cleansed, and we can only be delivered from the unholiness which is the perpetual and necessary barrier to our vision of God by making our very own, through simple faith, the energy and the blessedness of that great Sacrifice of propitiation. Then, and then only, do we properly come to the altar of incense. Its place in the Christian life is second, not first. 'First be reconciled to thy' Father, 'then lay' the incense 'on the altar.'

Again, great and deep lessons are given to us in the place of our altar in regard to the other articles that stood in that inner court. I have said that there were three of them. In the centre this altar of incense; on the one hand the great lampstand; on the other hand the table with loaves thereon. The one symbolised Israel's function in the world to be its light, which is our function too, and the other with loaves thereon symbolised the consecration to God of Israel's activities, and their results.

But between the two, central to both, stood the altar of incense. What does that say as to the place of prayer, defined as I have defined it, in the Christian

life? It says this, that the light will burn dim and go out, and the loaves, the expression and the consequences of our activities, will become mouldy and dry, unless both are hallowed and sustained by prayer. And that lesson is one which we all need, and which I suppose this generation needs quite as much as, if not more than, any that has gone before it. For life has become so swift and rushing, and from all sides, the Church, the world, society, there come such temptations, and exhortations, and necessities, for strenuous and continuous work, that the basis of all wholesome and vigorous work, communion with God, is but too apt to be put aside and relegated to some inferior position. The carbon points of the electric arc-light are eaten away with tremendous rapidity in the very act of giving forth their illumination, and they need to be continually approximated and to be frequently renewed. The oil is burned away in the act of shining, and the lamp needs to be charged again. If we are to do our work in the world as its lights, and if we are to have any activities fit to be consecrated to God and laid on the Table before the Veil, it can only be by our making the altar of incense the centre, and these others subsidiary.

One last thought—the place of prayer in the Christian life is shadowed for us by the position of this altar in reference to ‘the secret place of the Most High,’ that mysterious inner court which was dark but for the Shechinah’s light, and lonely but for the presence of the worshipping cherubim and the worshipped God. It stood, as we are told a verse or two after my text, ‘before the veil.’ A straight line drawn from the altar of sacrifice would have bisected the altar of incense as it passed into the mercy-seat and the glory. And that

just tells us that the place of prayer in the Christian life is that it is the direct way of coming close to God. Dear brother, we shall never lift the veil, and stand in 'the secret place of the Most High,' unless we take the altar of incense on our road.

There is one more thought here—

III. The altar of incense shows us how prayer is to be cultivated.

Twice a day, morning and evening, came the officiating priest with his pan of coals and incense, and laid it there; and during all the intervening hours between the morning and the evening the glow lay half hidden in the incense, and there was a faint but continual emission of fragrance from the smouldering mass that had been renewed in the morning, and again in the evening. And does not that say something to us? There must be definite times of distinct prayer if the aroma of devotion is to be diffused through our else scentless days. I ask for no pedantic adherence, with monastic mechanicalness, to hours and times, and forms of petitions. These are needful crutches to many of us. But what I do maintain is that all that talk which we hear so much of in certain quarters nowadays as to its not being necessary for us to have special times of prayer, and as to its being far better to have devotion diffused through our lives, and of how *laborare est orare*—to labour is to pray—all that is pernicious nonsense if it is meant to say that the incense will be fragrant and smoulder unless it is stirred up and renewed night and morning. There must be definite times of prayer if there is to be diffused devotion through the day. What would you think of people that said, 'Run your cars by electricity. Get it out of the wires; it will come! Never mind putting up any

generating stations'? And not less foolish are they who seek for a devotion permeating life which is not often concentrated into definite and specific acts.

But the other side is as true. It is bad to clot your religion into lumps, and to leave the rest of the life without it. There must be the smouldering all day long. 'Rejoice evermore; pray without ceasing.' You can pray thus. Not set prayer, of course; but a reference to Him, a thought of Him, like some sweet melody, 'so sweet we know not we are listening to it,' may breathe its fragrance, and diffuse its warmth into the commonest and smallest of our daily activities. It was when Gideon was threshing wheat that the angel appeared to him. It was when Elisha was ploughing that the divine inspiration touched him. It was when the disciples were fishing that they saw the Form on the shore. And when we are in the way of our common life it is possible that the Lord may meet us, and that our souls may be aspiring to Him. Then work will be worship; then burdens will be lightened; then our lamps will burn; then the fruits of our daily lives will ripen; then our lives will be noble; then our spirits will rest as well as soar, and find fruition and aspiration perpetually alternating in stable succession of eternal progress.

### RANSOM FOR SOULS—I.

'Then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul.'—EXODUS xxx. 12.

THIS remarkable provision had a religious intention. Connect it with the tax-money which Peter found in the fish's mouth.

I. Its meaning. Try to realise an Israelite's thoughts at the census. 'I am enrolled among the people and army of God: am I worthy? What am I, to serve so holy a God?' The payment was meant—

(a) To excite the sense of sin. This should be present in all approach to God, in all service; accompanying the recognition of our Christian standing. Our sense of sin is far too slight and weak; this defect is at the root of much feebleness in popular religion. The sense of sin must embrace not outward acts only, but inner spirit also.

(b) To suggest the possibility of expiation. It was 'ransom,' *i.e.* 'covering,' something paid that guilt might be taken away and sin regarded as non-existent. This is, of course, obviously, only a symbol. No tax could satisfy God for sin. The very smallness of the amount shows that it is symbolical only. 'Not with corruptible things as silver' is man redeemed.

II. Its identity for all. Rich or poor, high or low, all men are equal in sin. There are surface differences and degrees, but a deep identity beneath. So on the same principle all souls are of the same value. Here is the true democracy of Christianity. So there is one ransom for all, for the need of all is identical.

III. Its use. It was melted down for use in the sanctuary, so as to be a 'memorial' permanently present to God when His people met with Him. The greater portion was made into bases for the boards of the sanctuary. That is, God's dwelling with men and our communion with Him all rest on the basis of ransom. We are 'brought nigh by the blood of Christ.'

## RANSOM FOR SOULS—II.

'The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less than half a shekel. . . .'-EXODUS XXX. 15.

THIS tax was exacted on numbering the people. It was a very small amount, about fifteen pence, so it was clearly symbolical in its significance. Notice—

I. The broad principle of equality of all souls in the sight of God. Contrast the reign of caste and class in heathendom with the democracy of Judaism and of Christianity.

II. The universal sinfulness. Payment of the tax was a confession that all were alike in this: not that all were equally sinful, but all were sinful, whatever variations of degree might exist.

'There is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.'

III. The one ransom. It was a prophecy of which *we* know the meaning. Recall the incident of the 'stater' in the fish's mouth.

Christ declares His exemption from the tax. Yet He voluntarily comes under it, and He provides the payment of it for Himself and for Peter.

He does so by a miracle.

The Apostle has to 'take and give it'; so faith is called into exercise.

Thus there is but one Sacrifice for all; and the poorest can exercise faith and the richest can do no more. 'None other name.'

## THE GOLDEN CALF

'And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. 2. And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me. 3. And all the people brake off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron. 4. And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving-tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. 5. And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, To-morrow is a feast to the Lord. 6. And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play. 7. And the Lord said unto Moses, Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves: 8. They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. . . . 30. And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses said unto the people, Ye have sinned a great sin: and now I will go up unto the Lord; peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin. 31. And Moses returned unto the Lord, and said, Oh! this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. 32. Yet now, if Thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written. 33. And the Lord said unto Moses, Whosoever hath sinned against Me, him will I blot out of My book. 34. Therefore now go, lead the people unto the place of which I have spoken unto thee. Behold, Mine Angel shall go before thee: nevertheless in the day when I visit I will visit their sin upon them. 35. And the Lord plagued the people, because they made the calf, which Aaron made.'—EXODUS xxxiii. 1-8; 30-35.

It was not yet six weeks since the people had sworn, 'All that the Lord hath spoken will we do, and be obedient.' The blood of the covenant, sprinkled on them, was scarcely dry when they flung off allegiance to Jehovah. Such short-lived loyalty to Him can never have been genuine. That mob of slaves was galvanised by Moses into obedience; and since their acceptance of Jehovah was in reality only yielding to the power of one strong will and its earnest faith, of course it collapsed as soon as Moses disappeared.

We have to note, first, the people's universal revolt. The language of verse 1 may easily hide to a careless reader the gravity and unanimity of the apostasy.

'The people gathered themselves together.' It was a national rebellion, a flood which swept away even some faithful, timid hearts. No voices ventured to protest. What were the elders, who shortly before 'saw the God of Israel,' doing to be passive at such a crisis? Was there no one to bid the fickle multitude look up to the summit overhead, where the red flames glowed, or to remind them of the hosts of Egypt lying stark and dead on the shore? Was Miriam cowed too, and her song forgotten?

We need not cast stones at these people; for we also have short memories for either the terrible or the gracious revelations of God in our own lives. But we may learn the lesson that God's lovers have to set themselves sometimes dead against the rush of popular feeling, and that there are times when silence or compliance is sin.

It would have been easy for the rebels to have ignored Aaron, and made gods for themselves. But they desired to involve him in their apostasy, and to get 'official sanction' for it. He had been left by Moses as his lieutenant, and so to get him implicated was to stamp the movement as a regular and entire revolt.

The demand 'to make gods' (or, more probably, 'a god') flew in the face of both the first and second commandments. For Jehovah, who had forbidden the forming of any image, was denied in the act of making it. To disobey Him was to cast Him off. The ground of the rebellion was the craving for a visible object of trust and a visible guide, as is seen by the reason assigned for the demand for an image. Moses was out of sight; they must have something to look at as their leader. Moses had disappeared, and, to



these people who had only been heaved up to the height of believing in Jehovah by Moses, Jehovah had disappeared with him. They sank down again to the level of other races as soon as that strong lever ceased to lift their heavy apprehensions.

How ridiculous the assertion that they did not know what had become of Moses! They knew that he was up there with Jehovah. The elders could have told them that. The fire on the mount might have burned in on all minds the confirmation. Note, too, the black ingratitude and plain denial of Jehovah in 'the *man* that brought us up out of the land of Egypt.' They refuse to recognise God's part. It was Moses only who had done it; and now that he is gone they must have a visible god, like other nations.

Still sadder than their sense-bound wish is Aaron's compliance. He knew as well as we do what he should have said, but, like many another man in influential position, when beset by popular cries, he was frightened, and yielded when he should have 'set his face like a flint.' His compliance has in essentials been often repeated, especially by priests and ministers of religion who have lent their superior abilities or opportunities to carry out the wishes of the ignorant populace, and debased religion or watered down its prohibitions, to please and retain hold of them. The Church has incorporated much from heathenism. Roman Catholic missionaries have permitted 'converts' to keep their old usages. Protestant teachers have acquiesced in, and been content to find the brains to carry out, compromises between sense and soul, God's commands and men's inclinations.

We need not discuss the metallurgy of verse 4. But clearly Aaron asked for the earrings, not, as

some would have it, hoping that vanity and covetousness would hinder their being given, but simply in order to get gold for the bad work which he was ready to do. The reason for making the thing in the shape of a calf is probably the Egyptian worship of Apis in that form, which would be familiar to the people.

We must note that it was the people who said, 'These be thy gods, O Israel!' Aaron seems to keep in the rear, as it were. He makes the calf, and hands it over, and leaves them to hail it and worship. Like all cowards, he thought that he was lessening his guilt by thus keeping in the background. Feeble natures are fond of such subterfuges, and deceive themselves by them; but they do not shift their sin off their shoulders.

Then he comes in again with an impotent attempt to diminish the gravity of the revolt. 'When he saw this,' he tried to turn the flood into another channel, and so proclaimed a 'feast to Jehovah'!—as if He could be worshipped by flagrant defiance of His commandments, or as if He had not been disavowed by the ascription to the calf, made that morning out of their own trinkets, of the deliverance from Egypt. A poor, inconsequential attempt to save appearances and hallow sin by writing God's name on it! The 'god' whom the Israelites worshipped under the image of a calf, was no less another 'god before Me,' though it was called by the name of Jehovah. If the people had their idol, it mattered nothing to them, and it mattered as little to Jehovah, what 'name' it bore. The wild orgies of the morrow were not the worship which He accepts.

What a contrast between the plain and the moun-

tain! Below, the shameful feast, with its parody of sacrifice and its sequel of lust-inflamed dancing; above, the awful colloquy between the all-seeing righteous Judge and the intercessor! The people had cast off Jehovah, and Jehovah no more calls them 'My,' but '*thy* people.' They had ascribed their Exodus first to Moses, and next to the calf. Jehovah speaks of it as the work of Moses.

A terrible separation of Himself from them lies in '*thy* people, which *thou* broughtest up,' and Moses' bold rejoinder emphasises the relation and act which Jehovah seems to suppress (verse 11). Observe that the divine voice refuses to give any weight to Aaron's trick of compromise. These are no worshippers of Jehovah who are howling and dancing below there. They are '*worshipping it, and sacrificing to it,*' not to Him. The cloaks of sin may partly cover its ugliness here, but they are transparent to His eyes, and many a piece of worship, which is said to be directed to Him, is, in His sight, rank idolatry.

We do not deal with the magnificent courage of Moses, his single-handed arresting of the wild rebellion, and the severe punishment by which he trampled out the fire. But we must keep his severity in mind if we would rightly judge his self-sacrificing devotion, and his self-sacrificing devotion if we would rightly judge his severity.

No words of ours can make more sublime his utter self-abandonment for the sake of the people among whom he had just been flaming in wrath, and smiting like a destroying angel. That was a great soul which had for its poles such justice and such love. The very words of his prayer, in their abruptness, witness to his deep emotion. '*If Thou wilt forgive their sin*'

stands as an incomplete sentence, left incomplete because the speaker is so profoundly moved. Sometimes broken words are the best witnesses of our earnestness. The alternative clause reaches the high-water mark of passionate love, ready to give up everything for the sake of its objects. The 'book of life' is often spoken of in Scripture, and it is an interesting study to bring together the places where the idea occurs (see Ps. lxi. 28; Dan. xii. 1; Phil. iv. 3; Rev. iii. 5). The allusion is to the citizens' roll (Ps. lxxxvii. 6). Those whose names are written there have the privileges of citizenship, and, as it is the 'book of life' (or '*of the living*'), life in the widest sense is secured to them. To blot out of it, therefore, is to cut a man off from fellowship in the city of God, and from participation in life.

Moses was so absorbed in his vocation that his life was less to him than the well-being of Israel. How far he saw into the darkness beyond the grave we cannot say; but, at least, he was content, and desirous to die on earth, if thereby Israel might continue to be God's people. And probably he had some gleam of light beyond, which enhanced the greatness of his offered sacrifice. To die, whatever loss of communion with God that involved here or hereafter, would be sweet if thereby he could purchase Israel's restoration to God's favour. We cannot but think of Paul willing to be separated from Christ for his brethren's sake.

We may well think of a greater than Moses or Paul, who did bear the loss which they were willing to bear, and died that sin might be forgiven. Moses was a true type of Christ in that act of supreme self-sacrifice; and all the heroism, the identification of himself with his people, the love which willingly

accepts death, that makes his prayer one of the greatest deeds on the page of history, are repeated in infinitely sweeter, more heart-subduing fashion in the story of the Cross. Let us not omit duly to honour the servant; let us not neglect to honour and love infinitely more the Lord. 'This man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses.' Let us see that we render Him

'Thanks never ceasing,  
And infinite love.'

### THE SWIFT DECAY OF LOVE

'And Moses turned, and went down from the mount, and the two tables of the testimony were in his hand: the tables were written on both their sides; on the one side and on the other were they written. 16. And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables. 17. And when Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said unto Moses, There is a noise of war in the camp. 18. And he said, It is not the voice of them that shout for mastery, neither is it the voice of them that cry for being overcome: but the noise of them that sing do I hear. 19. And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf, and the dancing: and Moses' anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount. 20. And he took the calf which they had made, and burnt it in the fire, and ground it to powder, and strawed it upon the water, and made the children of Israel drink of it. 21. And Moses said unto Aaron, What did this people unto thee, that thou hast brought so great a sin upon them? 22. And Aaron said, Let not the anger of my lord wax hot: thou knowest the people, that they are set on mischief. 23. For they said unto me, Make us gods, which shall go before us: for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. 24. And I said unto them, Whosoever hath any gold, let them break it off. So they gave it me: then I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf. 25. And when Moses saw that the people were naked; (for Aaron had made them naked unto their shame among their enemies :) 26. Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the Lord's side? let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him.'—EXODUS xxxii. 15-26.

MOSES and Joshua are on their way down from the mountain, the former carrying the tables in his hands and a heavier burden in his heart,—the thought of the people's swift apostasy. Joshua's soldierly ear interprets the shouts which are borne up to them as war-cries;

‘He snuffeth the battle afar off, and saith Aha!’ But Moses knew that they meant worse than war, and his knowledge helped his ear to distinguish a cadence and unison in the noise, unlike the confused mingling of the victors’ yell of triumph and the shriek of the conquered. If we were dealing with fiction, we should admire the masterly dramatic instinct which lets the ear anticipate the eye, and so prepares us for the hideous sight that burst on these two at some turn in the rocky descent.

I. Note, then, what they saw. The vivid story puts it all in two words,—‘the calf and the dancing.’ There in the midst, perhaps on some pedestal, was the shameful copy of the Egyptian Apis; and whirling round it in mad circles, working themselves into frenzy by rapid motion and frantic shouts, were the people,—men and women, mingled in the licentious dance, who, six short weeks before, had sworn to the Covenant. Their bestial deity in the centre, and they compassing it with wild hymns, were a frightful contradiction of that grey altar and the twelve encircling stones which they had so lately reared, and which stood unregarded, a bow-shot off, as a silent witness against them. Note the strange, irresistible fascination of idolatry. Clearly the personal influence of Moses was the only barrier against it. The people thought that he had disappeared, and, if so, Jehovah had disappeared with him. We wonder at their relapses into idolatry, but we forget that it was then universal, that Israel was at the beginning of its long training, that not even a divine revelation could produce harvest in seedtime, and that to look for a final and complete deliverance from the ‘veil that was spread over all nations,’ at this stage, is like expecting a newly reclaimed bit of the backwoods to grow grass

as thick and velvety as has carpeted some lawn that has been mown and cared for for a century. Grave condemnation is the due of these short-memored rebels, who set up their 'abomination' in sight of the fire on Sinai; but that should not prevent our recognising the evidence which their sin affords of the tremendous power of idolatry in that stage of the world's history. Israel's proneness to fall back to heathenism makes it certain that a supernatural revelation is needed to account for their possession of the loftier faith which was so far above them.

That howling, leaping crowd tells what sort of religion they would have 'evolved' if left to themselves. Where did 'Thou shalt have none other gods beside Me' come from? Note the confusion of thought, so difficult for us to understand, which characterises idolatry. What a hopelessly inconsequential cry that was, 'Make us gods, which shall go before us!' and what a muddle of contradictions it was that men should say 'These be thy gods,' though they knew that the thing was made yesterday out of their own earrings! It took more than a thousand years to teach the nation the force of the very self-evident argument, as it seems to us, 'the workman made it, therefore it is not God.' The theory that the idol is only a symbol is not the actual belief of idolaters. It is a product of the study, but the worshipper unites in his thought the irreconcilable beliefs that it was made and is divine. A goldsmith will make and sell a Madonna, and when it is put in the cathedral, will kneel before it.

Note what was the sin here. It is generally taken for granted that it was a breach of the second, not of the first, commandment, and Aaron's proclamation of 'a feast to the Lord' is taken as proving this. Aaron

was probably trying to make an impossible compromise, and to find some salve for his conscience; but it does not follow that the people accepted the half-and-half suggestion. Leaders who try to control a movement which they disapprove, by seeming to accept it, play a dangerous game, and usually fail. But whether the people call the calf 'Jehovah' or 'Apis' matters very little. There would be as complete apostasy to another god, though the other god was called by the same name, if all that really makes his 'name' was left out, and foreign elements were brought in. Such worship as these wild dances, offered to an image, broke both the commandments, no matter by what name the image was invoked.

The roots of idolatry are in all men. The gross form of it is impossible to us; but the need for aid from sense, the dependence on art for wings to our devotion, which is a growing danger to-day, is only the modern form of the same dislike of a purely spiritual religion which sent these people dancing round their calf.

II. Mark Moses' blaze of wrath and courageous, prompt action. He dashes the tables on the rock, as if to break the record of the useless laws which the people have already broken, and, with his hands free, flings himself without pause into the midst of the excited mob. Verses 19 and 20 bear the impression of his rapid, decisive action in their succession of clauses, each tacked on to the preceding by a simple 'and.' Stroke followed stroke. His fiery earnestness swept over all obstacles, the base riot ceased, the ashamed dancers slunk away. Some true hearts would gather about him, and carry out his commands; but he did the real work, and, single-handed, cowed and controlled the mob. No doubt, it took more time



than the brief narrative, at first sight, would suggest. The image is flung into the fire from which it had come out. The fire made it, and the fire shall unmake it. We need not find difficulty in 'burning' a golden idol. That does not mean 'calcined,' and the writer is not guilty of a blunder, nor needed to be taught that you cannot burn gold. The next clause says that after it was 'burned,' it was still solid; so that, plainly, all that is meant is, that the metal was reduced to a shapeless lump. That would take some time. Then it was broken small; there were plenty of rocks to grind it up on. That would take some more time, but not a finger was lifted to prevent it. Then the more or less finely broken up fragments are flung into the brook, and, with grim irony, the people are bid to drink. 'You shall have enough of your idol, since you love him so. Here, down with him! You will have to take the consequences of your sin. You must drink as you have brewed.' It is at once a contemptuous demonstration of the idol's impotence, and a picture of the sure retribution.

But we may learn two things from this figure of the indignant lawgiver. One is, that the temper in which to regard idolatry is not one of equable indifference nor of scientific investigation, but that some heat of moral indignation is wholesome. We are all studying comparative mythology now, and getting much good from it; but we are in some danger of forgetting that these strange ideas and practices, which we examine at our ease, have spread spiritual darkness and moral infection over continents and through generations. Let us understand them, by all means; let us be thankful to find fragments of truth in, or innocent origins of, repulsive legends; but do not let the student

swallow up the Christian in us, nor our minds lose their capacity of wholesome indignation at the systems, blended with Christ-like pity and effort for the victims.

We may learn, further, how strong a man is when he is all aflame with true zeal for God. The suddenness of Moses' reappearance, the very audacity of his act, the people's habit of obedience, all helped to carry him through the crisis; but the true secret of his swift victory was his own self-forgetting faith. There is contagion in pure religious enthusiasm. It is the strongest of all forces. One man, with God at his back, is always in the majority. He whose whole soul glows with the pure fire, will move among men like flame in stubble. 'All things are possible to him that believeth.' Consecrated daring, animated by love and fed with truth, is all-conquering.

III. Note the weaker nature of Aaron, taking refuge in a transparent lie. Probably his dialogue with his brother came in before the process described in the former verses was accomplished. But the narrative keeps all that referred to the destruction of the idol together, and goes by subject rather than by time. We do not learn how Moses had come to know Aaron's share in the sin, but his question is one of astonishment. Had they bewitched him anyhow? or what inducement had led him so far astray? The stronger and devouter soul cannot conceive how the weaker had yielded. Aaron's answer puts the people's wish forward. 'They said, Make us gods'; that was all which they had 'done.' A poor excuse, as Aaron feels even while he is stammering it out. What would Moses have answered if the people had 'said' so to him? Did he, standing there, with the heat of his

struggle on him yet, look like a man that would acknowledge any demand of a mob as a reason for a ruler's compliance? It is the coward's plea. How many ecclesiastics and statesmen since then have had no better to offer for their acts! Such fear of the Lord as shrivelled before the breath of popular clamour could have had no deep roots. One of the first things to learn, whether we are in prominent or in private positions, is to hold by our religious convictions in supreme indifference to all surrounding voices, and to let no threats nor entreaties lead us to take one step beyond or against conscience.

Aaron feels the insufficiency of the plea, when he has to put it into plain words to such a listener, and so he flies to the resource of timid and weak natures, a lie. For what did he ask the gold, and put it into the furnace, unless he meant to make a god? Perhaps he had told the people the same story, as priests in all lands have been apt to claim a miraculous origin for idols. And he repeats it now, as if, were it true, he would plead the miracle as a vindication of the worship as well as his absolution. But the lie is too transparent to deserve even an answer, and Moses turns silently from him.

Aaron's was evidently the inferior nature, and was less deeply stamped with the print of heaven than his brother's. His feeble compliance is recorded as a beacon for all persons in places of influence or authority, warning them against self-interested or cowardly yielding to a popular demand, at the sacrifice of the purity of truth and the approval of their own consciences. He was not the last priest who has allowed the supposed wishes of the populace to shape his representations of God, and has knowingly dropped the

standard of duty or sullied the clear brightness of truth in deference to the many-voiced monster.

IV. Note the rallying of true hearts round Moses. The Revised Version reads 'broken loose' instead of 'naked,' and the correction is valuable. It explains the necessity for the separation of those who yet remained bound by the restraints of God's law, and for the terrible retribution that followed. The rebellion had not been stamped out by the destruction of the calf; and though Moses' dash into their midst had cowed the rebels for a time, things had gone too far to settle down again at once. The camp was in insurrection. It was more than a riot, it was a revolution. With the rapid eye of genius, Moses sees the gravity of the crisis, and, with equally swift decisiveness, acts so as to meet it. He 'stood in the gate of the camp,' and made the nucleus for the still faithful. His summons puts the full seriousness of the moment clearly before the people. They have come to a fork in the road. They must be either for Jehovah or against Him. There can be no mixing up of the worship of Jehovah and the images of Egypt, no tampering with God's service in obedience to popular clamour. It must be one thing or other. This is no time for the family of 'Mr. Facing-both-ways'; the question for each man is, 'Under which King?' Moses' unhesitating confidence that he is God's soldier, and that to be at his side is to be on God's side, was warranted in him, but has often been repeated with less reason by eager contenders, as they believed themselves to be, for God. No doubt, it becomes us to be modest and cautious in calling all true friends of God to rank themselves with us. But where the issue is between foul wrong and plain right, between palpable idolatry, error, or un-

bridled lust, and truth, purity, and righteousness, the Christian combatant for these is entitled to send round the fiery cross, and proclaim a crusade in God's name. There will always be plenty of people with cold water to pour on enthusiasm. We should be all the better for a few more, who would venture to feel that they are fighting for God, and to summon all who love Him to come to their and His help.

Moses' own tribe responded to the summons. And, no doubt, Aaron was there too, galvanised into a nobler self by the courage and fervour of his brother, and, let us hope, urged by penitence, to efface the memory of his faithlessness by his heroism now.

We do not go on to the dreadful retribution, which must be regarded, not as massacre, but as legal execution. It is folly to apply to it, or to other analogous instances, the ideas of this Christian century. We need not be afraid to admit that there has been a development of morality. The retributions of a stern age were necessarily stern. But if we want to understand the heart of Moses, or of Moses' God, we must not look only at the ruler of a wild people trampling out a revolt at the sacrifice of many lives, but listen to him, as the next section of the narrative shows him, pleading with tears for the rebels, and offering even to let his own name be blotted out of God's book if their sin might be forgiven. So, coupling the two parts of his conduct together, we may learn a little more clearly a lesson, of which this age has much need,—the harmony of retributive justice and pitying love; and may come to understand that Moses learned both the one and the other by fellowship with the God in whom they both dwell in perfection and concord.

## THE MEDIATOR'S THREEFOLD PRAYER

'And Moses said unto the Lord, See, Thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people: and Thou hast not let me know whom Thou wilt send with me. Yet Thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in My sight. 13. Now therefore, I pray Thee, if I have found grace in Thy sight, show me now Thy way, that I may know Thee, that I may find grace in Thy sight: and consider that this nation is Thy people. 14. And He said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest. 15. And he said unto Him, If Thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence. 16. For wherein shall it be known here that I and Thy people have found grace in Thy sight? Is it not in that Thou goest with us? So shall we be separated, I and Thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth. 17. And the Lord said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found grace in My sight, and I know thee by name. 18. And he said, I beseech Thee, show me Thy glory. 19. And He said, I will make all My goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy. 20. And he said, Thou canst not see My face: for there shall no man see Me, and live. 21. And the Lord said, Behold, there is a place by Me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: 22. And it shall come to pass, while My glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with My hand while I pass by: 23. And I will take away Mine hand, and thou shalt see My back parts; but My face shall not be seen.'—EXODUS xxxiii. 12-23.

THE calf worship broke the bond between God and Israel. Instead of His presence, 'an angel' is to lead them, for His presence could only be destruction. Mourning spreads through the camp, in token of which all ornaments are laid aside. The fate of the nation is in suspense, and the people wait, in sad attire, till God knows 'what to do unto' them. The Tabernacle is carried beyond the precincts of the camp, in witness of the breach, and all the future is doubtful. The preceding context describes (vs. 7-11) not one event, but the standing order of these dark days, when the camp had to be left if God was to be found, and when Moses alone received tokens of God's friendship, and the people stood wistfully and tremblingly gazing from afar, while the cloudy pillar wavered down to the Tabernacle door. Duty brought Moses back from

such communion; but Joshua did not need to come near the tents of the evil-doers, and, in the constancy of devout desire, made his home in the Tabernacle. In one of these interviews, so close and familiar, the wonderful dialogue here recorded occurred. It turns round three petitions, to each of which the Lord answers.

I. We have the leader's prayer for himself, with the over-abundant answer of God. In the former chapter, we had the very sublimity of intercession, in which the stern avenger of idolatry poured out his self-sacrificing love for the stiff-necked nation whom he had had to smite, and offered himself a victim for them. Here his first prayer is mainly for himself, but it is not therefore a selfish prayer. Rather he prays for gifts to himself, to fit him for his service to them. We may note separately the prayer, and the pleas on which it is urged. 'Show me now Thy way (or ways), that I may know Thee.' The desire immediately refers to the then condition of things. As we have pointed out, it was a time of suspense. In the strong metaphor of the context, God was making up His mind on His course, and Israel was waiting with hushed breath for the *dénouement*. It was not the entrance of the nation into the promised land which was in doubt, but the manner of their guidance, and the penalties of their idolatry. These things Moses asked to know, and especially, as verse 12 shows, to receive some more definite communication as to their leader than the vague 'an angel.' But the specific knowledge of God's 'way' was yearned for by him, mainly, as leading on to a deeper and fuller and more blessed knowledge of God Himself, and that again as leading to a fuller possession of God's favour, which, as already in some measure possessed, lay at

the foundation of the whole prayer. The connection of thought here goes far beyond the mere immediate blessing, which Moses needed at the moment. That cry for insight into the purposes and methods of Him whom the soul trusts, amid darkness and suspense, is the true voice of sonship. The more deeply it sees into these, the more does the devout soul feel the contrast between the spot of light in which it lives and the encircling obscurity, and the more does it yearn for the further setting back of the boundaries. Prayer does more than effort, for satisfying that desire. Nor is it mere curiosity or the desire for intellectual clearness that moves the longing. For the end of knowing God's ways is, for the devout man, a deeper, more blessed knowledge of God Himself, who is best known in His deeds; and the highest, most blessed issue of the God-given knowledge of God, is the conscious sunshine of His favour shining ever on His servant. That is not a selfish religion which, beginning with the assurance that we have found grace in His sight, seeks to climb, by happy paths of growing knowledge of Him as manifested in His ways, to a consciousness of that favour which is made stable and profound by clear insight into the depths of His purposes and acts.

The pleas on which this prayer is urged are two: the suppliant's heavy tasks, and God's great assurances to him. He boldly reminds God of what He has set him to do, and claims that he should be furnished with what is needful for discharging his commission. How can he lead if he is kept in the dark? When we are as sure as Moses was of God's charge to us, we may be as bold as he in asking the needful equipment for it. God does not send His servants out to sow without seed, or



to fight without a sword. His command is His pledge. He smiles approval when His servants' confidence assumes even bold forms, which sound like remonstrance and a suspicion that He was forgetting, for He discerns the underlying eagerness to do His will, and the trust in Him. The second plea is built on God's assurances of intimate and distinguishing knowledge and favour. He had said that He knew Moses 'by name,' by all these calls and familiar interviews which gave him the certainty of his individual relation to, and his special appointment from, the Lord. Such prerogative was inconsistent with reserve. The test of friendship is confidence. So pleads Moses, and God recognises the plea. 'I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth; but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.'

The plea based upon the relation of the people to God is subordinate in this first prayer. It is thrown in at the end almost as an afterthought; it boldly casts responsibility off Moses on to God, and does so to enforce the prayer that he should be equipped with all requisites for his work, as if he had said, 'It is more Thy concern than mine, that I should be able to lead them.' The divine answer is a promise to go not with the people, but with Moses. It is therefore not yet a full resolving of the doubtful matter, nor directly a reply to Moses' prayer. In one aspect it is less, and in another more, than had been asked. It seals to the man and to the leader the assurance that for himself he shall have the continual presence of God, in his soul and in his work, and that, in all the weary march, he will have rest, and will come to a fuller rest at its end. Thus God ever answers the true hearts that seek to

know Him, and to be fitted for their tasks. Whether the precise form of desire be fulfilled or no, the issue of such bold and trustful pleading is always the inward certainty of God's face shining on us, and the experience of repose, deep and untroubled in the midst of toil, so that we may be at once pilgrims towards, and dwellers in, 'the house of the Lord.'

II. We have the intercessor's prayer for the people, with the answer (vs. 15-17). If the promise of verse 14 is taken as referring to the people, there is nothing additional asked in this second stage, and the words of verse 17, 'this thing also,' are inexplicable. Observe that 'with me' in verse 15 is a supplement, and that the 'us' of the next clause, as well as the whole cast of verse 16, suggests that we should rather supply 'with us.' The substance, then, of the second petition, is the extension of the promise, already given to Moses for himself, to the entire nation. Observe how he identifies himself with them, making them 'partakers' in his grace, and reiterating 'I and Thy people,' as if he would have no blessing which was not shared by them. He seeks that the withdrawal of God's presence, which had been the consequence of Israel's withdrawal from God, should be reversed, and that not he alone, but all the rebels, might still possess His presence.

The plea for this prayer is God's honour, which was concerned in making it plain even in the remote wilderness, to the wandering tribes there, that His hand was upon Israel. Moses expands the argument which he had just touched before. The thought of His own glory, as the motive of God's acts, may easily be so put as to be repulsive; but at bottom it is the same as to say that His motive is love—for the glory which He seeks is the communication of true thoughts concerning His

character, that men may be made glad and like Himself thereby. Moses has learned that God's heart must long to reveal its depth of mercy, and therefore he pleads that even sinful Israel should not be left by God, in order that some light from His face may strike into a dark world. There is wide benevolence, as well as deep insight into the desires of God, in the plea.

The divine answer yields unconditionally to the request, and rests the reason for so doing wholly on the relation between God and Moses. The plea which he had urged in lowly boldness as the foundation of both his prayers is endorsed, and, for his sake, the divine presence is again granted to the people.

Can we look at this scene without seeing in it the operation on a lower field of the same great principle of intercession, which reaches its unique example in Jesus Christ? It is not arbitrary forcing of the gospel into the history, but simply the recognition of the essence of the history, when we see in it a foreshadowing of our great High-priest. He, too, knits Himself so closely with us, both by the assumption of our manhood and by the identity of loving sympathy, that He accepts nothing from the Father's hand for Himself alone. He, too, presents Himself before God, and says 'I and Thy people.' The great seal of proof for the world that He is the beloved of God, lies in the divine guardianship and guidance of His servants. His prayer for them prevails, and the reason for its prevalence is God's delight in Him. The very sublime of self-sacrificing love was in the law-giver, but the height of his love, measured against the immeasurable altitude of Christ's, is as a mole-hill to the Andes.

III. We have the last soaring desire which rises above the limits of the present. These three petitions teach the insatiableness, if we may use the word, of devout desires. Each request granted brings on a greater. 'The gift doth stretch itself as 'tis received.' Enjoyment increases capacity, and increase of capacity is increase of desire. God being infinite, and man capable of indefinite growth, neither the widening capacity nor the infinite supply can have limits. This is not the least of the blessings of a devout life, that the appetite grows with what it feeds on, and that, while there is always satisfaction, there is never satiety.

Moses' prayer sounds presumptuous, but it was heard unblamed, and granted in so far as possible. It was a venial error—if error it may be called—that a soul, touched with the flame of divine love, should aspire beyond the possibilities of mortality. At all events, it was a fault in which he has had few imitators. *Our* desires keep but too well within the limits of the possible. The precise meaning of the petition must be left undetermined. Only this is clear, that it was something far beyond even that face-to-face intercourse which he had had, as well as beyond that vision granted to the elders. If we are to take 'glory' in its usual sense, it would mean the material symbol of God's presence, which shone at the heart of the pillar, and dwelt afterwards between the cherubim, but probably we must attach a loftier meaning to it here, and rather think of what we should call the uncreated and infinite divine essence. Only do not let us make Moses talk like a metaphysician or a theological professor. Rather we should hear in his cry the voice of a soul thrilled through and through with the astounding consciousness of God's favour, blessed

with love-gifts in answered prayers, and yearning for more of that light which it feels to be life.

And if the petition be dark, the answer is yet more obscure 'with excess of light.' Mark how it begins with granting, not with refusing. It tells how much the loving desire has power to bring, before it speaks of what in it must be denied. There is infinite tenderness in that order of response. It speaks of a heart that does not love to say 'no,' and grants our wishes up to the very edge of the possible, and wraps the bitterness of any refusal in the sweet envelope of granted requests. A broad distinction is drawn between that in God which can be revealed, and that which cannot. The one is 'glory,' the other 'goodness,' corresponding, we might almost say, to the distinction between the 'moral' and the 'natural' attributes of God. But, whatever mysterious revelation under the guise of vision may be concealed in these words, and in the fulfilment of them in the next chapter, they belong to the 'things which it is impossible for a man to utter,' even if he has received them. We are on more intelligible ground in the next clause of the promise, the proclamation of 'the Name.' That expression is, in Scripture, always used as meaning the manifested character of God. It is a revelation addressed to the spirit, not to the sense. It is the translation, so far as it is capable of translation, of the vision which it accompanied; it is the treasure which Moses bore away from Sinai, and has shared among us all. The reason for his prayer was probably his desire to have his mediatorial office confirmed and perfected; and it was so, by that proclamation of the Name. The reason for this marvellous gift is next set forth as being God's own unconditional grace and mercy. He is His own motive, His

own reason. Just as the independent and absolute fullness of His being is expressed by the name 'I am that I am,' so the independent and absolute freeness of His mercy, whether in granting Moses' prayer or in pardoning the people, is expressed by 'I will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy.' Not till all this exuberance of gracious answer has smoothed the way does the denial of the impossible request come; and even then it is so worded as to lay all the emphasis on what is granted, and to show that the refusal is but another phase of love. The impossibility of beholding the Face is reiterated, and then the careful provisions which God will make for the fulfilment of the possible part of the bold wish are minutely detailed. The distinction between the revealable and unrevealable, which has been already expressed by the contrast of 'glory' and 'grace,' now appears in the distinction between the 'face' which cannot be looked on, and the 'back' which may be.

Human language and thought are out of their depth here. We must be content to see a dim splendour shining through the cloudy words, to know that there was granted to one man a realisation of God's presence, and a revelation of His character, so far transcending ordinary experiences as that it was fitly called sight, but yet as far beneath the glory of His being as the comparatively imperfect knowledge of a man's form, when seen only from behind, is beneath that derived from looking him in the face.

But whatever was the singular prerogative of the lawgiver, as he gazed from the cleft of the rock at the receding glory, we see more than he ever did; and the Christian child, who looks upon the 'glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ,' has a vision which outshines the

flashing radiance that shone round Moses. It deepened his convictions, confirmed his faith, added to his assurance of his divine commission, but only added to his knowledge of God by the proclamation of the Name, and that Name is more fully proclaimed in our ears. Sinai, with all its thunders, is silent before Calvary. And he who has Jesus Christ to declare God's Name to him need not envy the lawgiver on the mountain, nor even the saints in heaven.

### GOD PROCLAIMING HIS OWN NAME

'The Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.'—*Exodus xxxiv. 6.*

THIS great event derives additional significance and grandeur from the place in which it stands. It follows the hideous act of idolatry in which the levity and sinfulness of Israel reached their climax. The trumpet of Sinai had hardly ceased to peal, and there in the rocky solitudes, in full view of the mount 'that burned with fire,' while the echoes of the thunder and the Voice still lingered, one might say, among the cliffs, that mob of abject cowards were bold enough to shake off their allegiance to God, and, forgetful of all the past, plunged into idolatry, and wallowed in sensuous delights. What a contrast between Moses on the mount and Aaron and the people in the plain! Then comes the wonderful story of the plague and of Moses' intercession, followed by the high request of Moses, so strange and yet so natural at such a time, for the vision of God's 'glory.' Into all the depths of that I do not need to plunge. Enough that he is told that his

desire is beyond the possibilities of creatural life. The mediator and lawgiver cannot rise beyond the bounds of human limitations. But what *can* be *shall* be. God's 'goodness' will pass before him. Then comes this wonderful advance in the progress of divine revelation. If we remember the breach of the Covenant, and then turn to these words, considered as evoked by the people's sin, they become very remarkable. If we consider them as the answer to Moses' desire, they are no less so. Taking these two thoughts with us, let us consider them in—

I. The answer to the request for a sensuous manifestation.

The request is 'show me,' as if some visible manifestation were desired and expected, or, if not a visible, at least a direct perception of Jehovah's 'glory.' Moses desires that he, as mediator and lawgiver, may have some closer knowledge. The answer to his request is a word, the articulate proclamation of the 'Name' of the Lord. It is higher than all manifestation to sense, which was what Moses had asked. Here there is no symbol as of the Lord in the 'cloud.' The divine manifestation is impossible to sense, and that, too, not by reason of man's limitations, but by reason of God's nature. The manifestation to spirit in full immediate perception is impossible also. It has to be maintained that we know God only 'in part'; but it does not follow that our knowledge is only representative, or is not of Him 'as He is.' Though not whole it is real, so far as it goes.

But this is not the highest form. Words and propositions can never reveal so fully, nor with such certitude, as a personal revelation. But we have Christ's life, 'God manifest': not words about God, but the mani-



festation of the very divine nature itself in action. 'Merciful':—and we see Jesus going about 'doing good.' 'Gracious,' and we see Him welcoming to Himself all the weary, and ever bestowing of the treasures of His love. 'Longsuffering':—'Father! forgive them!' God is 'plenteous in mercy and in truth,' forgiving transgression and sin:—'Thy sins be forgiven thee.'

How different it all is when we have deeds, a human life, on which to base our belief! How much more certain, as well as coming closer to our hearts! Merely verbal statements need proof, they need warming. In Christ's showing us the Father they are changed as from a painting to a living being; they are brought out of the region of abstractions into the concrete.

'And so the word had breath, and wrought  
With human hands the creed of creeds.'

'Show us the Father and it sufficeth us.' 'He that hath seen Me, hath seen the Father.'

Is there any other form of manifestation possible? Yes; in heaven there will be a closer vision of Christ—not of God. Our knowledge of Christ will there be expanded, deepened, made more direct. We know not how. There will be bodily changes: 'Like unto the body of His glory,' etc. 'We shall be like Him.' 'Changed from glory to glory.'

II. The answer to the desire to see God's glory.

The 'Glory' was the technical name for the lustrous cloud that hung over the Mercy-seat, but here it probably means more generally some visible manifestation of the divine presence. What Moses craved to see with his eyes was the essential divine light. That vision he did not receive, but what he did receive was partly

a visible manifestation, though not of the dazzling radiance which no human eye can see and live, and still more instructive and encouraging, the communication in words of that shining galaxy of attributes, 'the glories that compose Thy name.' In the name specially so-called, the name Jehovah, was revealed absolute eternal Being, and in the accompanying declaration of so-called 'attributes' were thrown into high relief the two qualities of merciful forgiveness and retributive justice. The 'attributes' which separate God from us, and in which vulgar thought finds the marks of divinity, are conspicuous by their absence. Nothing is said of omniscience, omnipresence, and the like, but forgiveness and justice, of both of which men carry analogues in themselves, are proclaimed by the very voice of God as those by which He desires that He should be chiefly conceived of by us.

The true 'glory of God' is His pardoning Love. That is the glowing heart of the divine brightness. If so, then the very heart of that heart of brightness, the very glory of the 'Glory of God,' is the Christ, in whom we behold that which was at once 'the glory as of the only begotten of the Father' and the 'Glory of the Father.'

In Jesus these two elements, pardoning love and retributive justice, wondrously meet, and the mystery of the possibility of their harmonious co-operation in the divine government is solved, and becomes the occasion for the rapturous gratitude of man and the wondering adoration of principalities and powers in heavenly places. Jesus has manifested the divine mercifulness; Jesus has borne the burden of sin and the weight of the divine Justice. The lips that said 'Be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee,' also cried,

‘Why hast Thou forsaken Me?’ The tenderest manifestation of the God ‘plenteous in mercy . . . forgiving iniquity,’ and the most awe-kindling manifestation of the God ‘that will by no means clear the guilty,’ are fused into one, when we ‘behold that Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.’

III. The answer to a great sin.

This Revelation is the immediate issue of Israel’s great apostasy.

Sin evokes His pardoning mercy. This insignificant speck in Creation has been the scene of the wonder of the Incarnation, not because its magnitude was great, but because its need was desperate. Men, because they are sinners, have been subjects of an experience more precious than the ‘angels which excel in strength’ and hearken ‘to the voice of His word’ have known or can know. The wilder the storm of human evil roars and rages, the deeper and louder is the voice that peals across the storm. So for us all Christ is the full and final revelation of God’s grace. The last, because the perfect embodiment of it; the sole, because the sufficient manifestation of it. ‘See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh.’

## SIN AND FORGIVENESS

‘. . . Forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty. . . .’—EXODUS xxxiv. 7.

THE former chapter tells us of the majesty of the divine revelation as it was made to Moses on ‘the mount of God.’ Let us notice that, whatever was the visible pomp of the external Theophany to the senses, the true revela-

tion lay in the proclamation of the 'Name'; the revelation to the conscience and the heart; and such a revelation had never before fallen on mortal ears. It is remarkable that the very system which was emphatically one of law and retribution should have been thus heralded by a word which is perfectly 'evangelical' in its whole tone. That fact should have prevented many errors as to the relation of Judaism and Christianity. The very centre of the former was 'God is love,' 'merciful and gracious,' and if there follows the difficult addition 'visiting the iniquities,' etc., the New Testament adds its 'Amen' to that. True, the harmony of the two and the great revelation of the *means* of forgiveness lay far beyond the horizon of Moses and his people, but none the less was it the message of Judaism that 'there is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mayest be feared.' The law spoke of retribution, justice, duty, and sin, but side by side with the law was another institution, the sacrificial worship, which proclaimed that God was full of love, and that the sinner was welcomed to His side. And it is the root of many errors to transfer New Testament language about the law to the whole Old Testament system. But, passing away from this, I wish to look at two points in these words.

I. The characteristics of human sins.

II. The divine treatment of them.

I. The characteristics of human sins.

Observe the threefold form of expression—iniquity and transgression and sin.

It seems natural that in the divine proclamation of His own holy character, the sinful nature of men should be characterised with all the fervid energy of

such words; for the accumulation even of synonyms would serve a *moral* purpose, expressive at once of the divine displeasure against sin, and of the free full pardon for it in all its possible forms. But the words are very far from all meaning the same thing. They all designate the same actions, but from different points of view, and with reference to different phases and qualities of sin.

Now these three expressions are inadequately represented by the English translation.

'Iniquity' literally means 'twisting,' or 'something twisted,' and is thus the opposite of 'righteousness,' or rather of what is 'straight.' It is thus like our own 'right' and 'wrong,' or like the Latin 'in-iquity' (by which it is happily enough rendered in our version). So looking at this word and the thoughts which connect themselves with it, we come to this:—

(1) All sin of every sort is deviation from a standard to which we ought to be conformed.

Note the graphic force of the word as giving the straight line to which our conduct ought to run parallel, and the contrast between it and the wavering curves into which our lives meander, like the lines in a child's copy-book, or a rude attempt at drawing a circle at one sweep of the pencil. Herbert speaks of

'The crooked wandering ways in which we live.'

There is a path which is 'right' and one which is 'wrong,' whether we believe so or not.

There are hedges and limitations for us all. This law extends to the ordering of all things, whether great or small. If a line be absolutely straight, and we are running another parallel to it, the smallest possible wavering is fatal to our copy. And the smallest deflec-

tion, if produced, will run out into an ever-widening distance from the straight line.

There is nothing which it is more difficult to get into men's belief than the sinfulness of little sins; nothing more difficult to cure ourselves of than the habit of considering quantity rather than quality in moral questions. What a solemn thought it is, that of a great absolute law of right rising serene above us, embracing everything! And this is the first idea that is here in our text—a grave and deep one.

But the second of these expressions for sin literally means 'apostasy,' 'rebellion,' not 'transgression,' and this word brings in a more solemn thought yet, viz. :—

(2) Every sin is apostasy from or rebellion against God.

The former word dealt only with abstract thought of a 'law,' this with a 'Lawgiver.'

Our obligations are not merely to a law, but to Him who enacted it. So it becomes plain that the very centre of all sin is the shaking off of obedience to God. Living to 'self' is the inmost essence of every act of evil, and may be as virulently active in the smallest trifle as in the most awful crime.

How infinitely deeper and darker this makes sin to be!

When one thinks of our obligations and of our dependence, of God's love and care, what an 'evil and a bitter thing' every sin becomes!

Urge this terrible contrast of a loving Father and a disobedient child.

This idea brings out the ingratitude of all sin.

But the third word here used literally means 'missing an aim,' and so we come to

(3) Every sin misses the goal at which we should aim,

There may be a double idea here—that of failing in the great purpose of our being, which is already partially included in the first of these three expressions, or that of missing the aim which we proposed to ourselves in the act. All sin is a failure.

By it we fall short of the loftiest purpose. Whatever we gain we lose more.

Every life which has sin in it is a 'failure.' You may be prosperous, brilliant, successful, but you are 'a failure.'

For consider what human life might be: full of God and full of joy. Consider what the 'fruits' of sin are. 'Apples of Sodom.' How sin leads to sorrow. This is an inevitable law. Sin fails to secure what it sought for. All 'wrong' is a mistake, a blunder. 'Thou fool!'

So this word suggests the futility of sin considered in its consequences. 'These be thy gods, O Israel!' 'The end of these things is death.'

## II. The divine treatment of sins.

'Forgiving,' and yet not suffering them to go unpunished.

(1) God *forgives*, and yet He does not leave sin unpunished, for He will 'by no means *clear* the guilty.'

The one word refers to His love, His heart; the other to the retributions which are inseparable from the very course of nature.

Forgiveness is the flow of God's love to all, and the welcoming back to His favour of all who come. Forgiveness likewise includes the escape from the extreme and uttermost consequences of sin in this life and in the next, the sense of God's displeasure here, and the final separation from Him, which is eternal death. Forgiveness is not inconsistent with retribution. There must needs be retribution, from—

(a) The very constitution of our nature.

Conscience, our spiritual nature, our habits all demand it.

(b) The constitution of the world.

In it all things work under God, but only for 'good' to them who love God. To all others, sooner or later, the Nemesis comes. 'Ye shall eat of the fruit of your doings.'

(2) *God* forgives, and therefore He does not leave sin unpunished. It is divine mercy that strikes. The end of His chastisement is to separate us from our sins.

(3) Divine forgiveness and retributive justice both centre in the revelation of the Cross.

To us this message comes. It was the hidden heart of the Mosaic system. It was the revelation of Sinai. To Israel it was 'proclaimed' in thunder and darkness, and the way of forgiveness and the harmony of righteousness and mercy were veiled. To us it is proclaimed from Calvary. There in full light the Lord passes before us and proclaims, 'I am the Lord, the Lord God merciful and gracious.' 'Ye are come . . . unto Jesus.' 'See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh.' 'This is my Beloved Son, hear Him!'

### BLESSED AND TRAGIC UNCONSCIOUSNESS

'... Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with Him.'—EXODUS xxxiv. 29.

'... And Samson wist not that the Lord had departed from him.'—JUDGES xvi. 20.

THE recurrence of the same phrase in two such opposite connections is very striking. Moses, fresh from the mountain of vision, where he had gazed on as much of the glory of God as was accessible to man, caught



some gleam of the light which he adoringly beheld; and a strange radiance sat on his face, unseen by himself, but visible to all others. So, supreme beauty of character comes from beholding God and talking with Him; and the bearer of it is unconscious of it.

Samson, fresh from his coarse debauch, and shorn of the locks which he had vowed to keep, strides out into the air, and tries his former feats; but his strength has left him because the Lord has left him; and the Lord has left him because, in his fleshly animalism, he has left the Lord. Like, but most unlike, Moses, he knows not his weakness. So strength, like beauty, is dependent upon contact with God, and may ebb away when that is broken, and the man may be all unaware of his weakness till he tries his power, and ignominiously fails.

These two contrasted pictures, the one so mysteriously grand and the other so tragic, may well help to illustrate for us truths that should be burned into our minds and our memories.

I. Note, then, the first thought which they both teach us, that beauty and strength come from communion with God.

In both the cases with which we are dealing these were of a merely material sort. The light on Moses' face and the strength in Samson's arm were, at the highest, but types of something far higher and nobler than themselves. But still, the presence of the one and the departure of the other alike teach us the conditions on which we may possess both in nobler form, and the certainty of losing them if we lose hold of God.

Moses' experience teaches us that the loftiest beauty of character comes from communion with God. That is the use that the Apostle makes of this remarkable

incident in 2 Cor. iii., where he takes the light that shone from Moses' face as being the symbol of the better lustre that gleams from all those who 'behold (or reflect) the glory of the Lord' with unveiled faces, and, by beholding, are 'changed into the likeness' of that on which they gaze with adoration and longing. The great law to which, almost exclusively, Christianity commits the perfecting of individual character is this: Look at Him till you become like Him, and in beholding, be changed. 'Tell me the company a man keeps, and I will tell you his character,' says the old proverb. And what is true on the lower levels of daily life, that most men become assimilated to the complexion of those around them, especially if they admire or love them, is the great principle whereby worship, which is desire and longing and admiration in the superlative degree, stamps the image of the worshipped upon the character of the worshipper. 'They followed after vanity, and have become vain,' says one of the prophets, gathering up into a sentence the whole philosophy of the degradation of humanity by reason of idolatry and the worship of false gods. 'They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them.' The law works upwards as well as downwards, for whom we worship we declare to be infinitely good; whom we worship we long to be like; whom we worship we shall certainly imitate.

Thus, brethren, the practical, plain lesson that comes from this thought is simply this: If you want to be pure and good, noble and gentle, sweet and tender; if you desire to be delivered from your own weaknesses and selfish, sinful idiosyncrasies, the way to secure your desire is, 'Look unto Me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.' Contemplation, which is love and

longing, is the parent of all effort that succeeds. Contemplation of God in Christ is the master-key that opens this door, and makes it possible for the lowliest and the foulest amongst us to cherish unpretentious hopes of 'being like Him' if we see Him as He is revealed here, and perfectly like Him when yonder we see Him 'as He is.'

There have been in the past, and there are to-day, thousands of simple souls, shut out by lowliness of position and other circumstances from all the refining and ennobling influences of which the world makes so much, who yet in character and bearing, ay, and sometimes in the very look of their meek faces, are living witnesses how mighty to transform a nature is the power of loving gazing upon Jesus Christ. All of us who have had much to do with Christians of the humbler classes know that. There is no influence to refine and beautify men like that of living near Jesus Christ, and walking in the light of that Beauty which is 'the effulgence of the divine glory and the express image of His Person.'

And in like manner as beauty so strength comes from communion with God and laying hold on Him. We can only think of Samson as a 'saint' in a very modified fashion, and present him as an example in a very limited degree. His dependence upon divine power was rude, and divorced from elevation of character and morality, but howsoever imperfect, fragmentary, and I might almost say to our more trained eyes, grotesque, it looks, yet there was a reality in it; and when the man was faithless to his vow, and allowed the crafty harlot's scissors to shear from his head the token of his consecration, it was because the reality of the consecration, rude and external as that

consecration was, both in itself and in its consequences, had passed away from him.

And so we may learn the lesson, taught at once by the flashing face of the lawgiver and the enfeebled force of the hero, that the two poles of perfectness in humanity, so often divorced from one another—beauty and strength—have one common source, and depend for their loftiest position upon the same thing. God possesses both in supremest degree, being the Almighty and the All-fair; and we possess them in limited, but yet possibly progressive, measure, through dependence upon Him. The true force of character, and the true power for work, and every real strength which is not disguised weakness, ‘a lath painted to look like iron,’ come on condition of our keeping close by God. The Fountain is open for you all; see to it that you resort thither.

II. And now the second thought of my text is that the bearer of the radiance is unconscious of it.

‘Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone.’ In all regions of life, the consummate apex and crowning charm of excellence is unconsciousness of excellence. Whenever a man begins to imagine that he is good, he begins to be bad; and every virtue and beauty of character is robbed of some portion of its attractive fairness when the man who bears it knows, or fancies, that he possesses it. The charm of childhood is its perfect unconsciousness, and the man has to win back the child’s heritage, and become ‘as a little child,’ if he would enter into and dwell in the ‘Kingdom of Heaven.’ And so in the loftiest region of all, that of the religious life, you may be sure that the more a man is like Christ, the less he knows it; and the better he is, the less he suspects it. The reasons why that is so, point, at the

same time, to the ways by which we may attain to this blessed self-oblivion. So let me put just in a word or two some simple, practical thoughts.

Let us, then, try to lose ourselves in Jesus Christ. That way of self-oblivion is emancipation and blessedness and power. It is safe for us to leave all thoughts of our miserable selves behind us, if instead of them we have the thought of that great, sweet, dear Lord, filling mind and heart. A man walking on a tight-rope will be far more likely to fall, if he is looking at his toes, than if he is looking at the point to which he is going. If we fix our eyes on Jesus, then we can safely look, neither to our feet nor to the gulfs; but straight at Him gazing, we shall straight to Him advance. 'Looking off' from ourselves 'unto Jesus' is safe; looking off anywhere else is peril. Seek that self-oblivion which comes from self being swallowed up in the thought of the Lord.

And again, I would say, think constantly and longingly of the unattained. 'Brethren! I count not myself to have apprehended.' Endless aspiration and a stinging consciousness of present imperfection are the loftiest states of man here below. The beholders down in the valley, when they look up, may see our figures against the skyline, and fancy us at the summit, but our loftier elevation reveals untrodden heights beyond; and we have only risen so high in order to discern more clearly how much higher we have to rise. Dissatisfaction with the present is the condition of excellence in all pursuits of life, and in the Christian life even more eminently than in all others, because the goal to be attained is in its very nature infinite; and therefore ensures the blessed certainty of continual progress; accompanied here,

indeed, with the sting and bite of a sense of imperfection, but one day to be only sweetness, as we think of how much there is yet to be won in addition to the perfection of the present.

So, dear friends, the best way to keep ourselves unconscious of present attainments is to set our faces forward, and to make 'all experience' as 'an arch wherethro' gleams that untravelled world to which we move.' 'Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone.'

The third practical suggestion that I would make is, cultivate a clear sense of your own imperfections. We do not need to try to learn our goodness. That will suggest itself to us only too clearly; but what we do need is to have a very clear sense of our shortcomings and failures, our faults of temper, our faults of desire, our faults in our relations to our fellows, and all the other evils that still buzz and sting and poison our blood. Has not the best of us enough of these to knock all the conceit out of us? A true man will never be so much ashamed of himself as when he is praised, for it will always send him to look into the deep places of his heart, and there will be a swarm of ugly, creeping things under the stones there, if he will only turn them up and look beneath. So let us lose ourselves in Christ, let us set our faces to the unattained future, let us clearly understand our own faults and sins.

III. Thirdly, the strong man made weak is unconscious of his weakness.

I do not mean here to touch at all upon the general thought that, by its very nature, all evil tends to make us insensitive to its presence. Conscience becomes dull by practice of sin and by neglect of conscience, until that which at first was as sensitive as the palm of a little child's hand becomes as if it were 'seared

with a hot iron.' The foulness of the atmosphere of a crowded hall is not perceived by the people in it. It needs a man to come in from the outer air to detect it. We can accustom ourselves to any mephitic and poisonous atmosphere, and many of us live in one all our days, and do not know that there is any need of ventilation or that the air is not perfectly sweet. The 'deceitfulness' of sin is its great weapon.

But what I desire to point out is an even sadder thing than that—namely, that Christian people may lose their strength because they let go their hold upon God, and know nothing about it. Spiritual declension, all unconscious of its own existence, is the very history of hundreds of nominal Christians amongst us, and, I dare say, of some of us. The very fact that you do not suppose the statement to have the least application to yourself is perhaps the very sign that it does apply. When the lifeblood is pouring out of a man, he faints before he dies. The swoon of unconsciousness is the condition of some professing Christians. Frost-bitten limbs are quite comfortable, and only tingle when circulation is coming back. I remember a great elm-tree, the pride of an avenue in the south, that had spread its branches for more years than the oldest man could count, and stood, leafy and green. Not until a winter storm came one night and laid it low with a crash did anybody suspect what everybody saw in the morning—that the heart was eaten out of it, and nothing left but a shell of bark. Some Christian people are like that; they manage to grow leaves, and even some fruit, but when the storm comes they will go down, because the heart has been out of their religion for years. 'Samson wist not that the Lord was departed from him.'

And so, brother, because there are so many things that mask the ebbing away of a Christian life, and because our own self-love and habits come in to hide declension, let me earnestly exhort you and myself to watch ourselves very narrowly. Unconsciousness does not mean ignorant presumption or presumptuous ignorance. It is difficult to make an estimate of ourselves by poking into our own sentiments and supposed feelings and convictions, and the estimate is likely to be wrong. There is a better way than that. Two things tell what a man is—one, what he wants, and the other, what he does. As the will is, the man is. Where do the currents of your desires set? If you watch their flow, you may be pretty sure whether your religious life is an ebbing or a rising tide. The other way to ascertain what we are is rigidly to examine and judge what we do. 'Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord.' Actions are the true test of a man. Conduct is the best revelation of character, especially in regard to ourselves. So let us 'watch and be sober'—sober in our estimate of ourselves, and determined to find every lurking evil, and to drag it forth into the light.

Again, let me say, let us ask God to help us. 'Search me, O God! and try me.' We shall never rightly understand what we are, unless we spread ourselves out before Him and crave that Divine Spirit, who is 'the candle of the Lord,' to be carried ever in our hands into the secret recesses of our sinful hearts. 'Anoint thine eyes with eye salve that thou mayest see,' and get the eye salve by communion with God, who will supply thee a standard by which to try thy poor, stained, ragged righteousness. The *collyrium*, the eye salve, may be, will be, painful when it is rubbed into the



lids, but it will clear the sight; and the first work of Him, whose dearest name is *Comforter*, is to convince of sin.

And, last of all, let us keep near to Jesus Christ, near enough to Him to feel His touch, to hear His voice, to see His face, and to carry down with us into the valley some radiance on our countenances which may tell even the world, that we have been up where the Light lives and reigns.

‘Because thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked, I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye salve, that thou mayest see.’

## AN OLD SUBSCRIPTION LIST

‘And they came, every one whose heart stirred him up, and every one whom his spirit made willing, and they brought the Lord’s offering to the work. . . .’—  
EXODUS xxxv. 21.

THIS is the beginning of the catalogue of contributions towards the erection of the Tabernacle in the wilderness. It emphasises the purely spontaneous and voluntary character of the gifts. There was plenty of compulsory work, of statutory contribution, in the Old Testament system of worship. Sacrifices and tithes and other things were imperative, but the Tabernacle was constructed by means of undemanded offerings, and there were parts of the standing ritual which were left to the promptings of the worshipper’s own spirit. There

was always a door through which the impulses of devout hearts could come in, to animate what else would have become dead, mechanical compliance with prescribed obligations. That spontaneous surrender of precious things, not because a man must give them, but because he delights in letting his love come to the surface and find utterance in giving which is still more blessed than receiving, had but a narrow and subordinate sphere of action assigned to it in the legal system of the Old Covenant, but it fills the whole sphere of Christianity, and becomes the only kind of offering which corresponds to its genius and is acceptable to Christ. We may look, then, not merely at the words of our text, but at the whole section of which they form the introduction, and find large lessons for ourselves, not only in regard to the one form of Christian service which is pecuniary liberality, but in reference to all which we have to do for Jesus Christ, in the picture which it gives us of that eager crowd of willing givers, flocking to the presence of the lawgiver, with hands laden with gifts so various in kind and value, but all precious because freely and delightedly brought, and all needed for the structure of God's house.

I. We have set forth here the true motive of acceptable service.

'They came, every one whose heart stirred him up, and every one whom his spirit made willing.' There is a striking metaphor in that last word. Wherever the spirit is touched with the sweet influences of God's love, and loves and gives back again, that spirit is buoyant, lifted, raised above the low, flat levels where selfishness feeds fat and then rots. The spirit is raised by any great and unselfish emotion. There is buoyancy and glad consciousness of elevation in all the

self-sacrifice of love, which dilates and lifts the spirit as the light gas smoothes out the limp folds of silk in a balloon, and sends it heavenwards, a full sphere. Only service or surrender, which is thus cheerful because it is the natural expression of love, is true service in God's sight. Whosoever, then, had his spirit raised and made buoyant by a great glad resolve to give up some precious thing for God's sanctuary, came with his gift in his hand, and he and it were accepted. That trusting of men's giving to spontaneous liberality was exceptional under the law. It is normal under the Gospel, and has filled the whole field, and driven out the other principle of statutory and constrained service and sacrifice altogether. We have its feeble beginnings in this incident. It is sovereign in Christ's Church. There are no pressed men on board Christ's ship. None but volunteers make up His army. 'Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy might.' He cares nothing for any service but such as it would be pain to keep back; nothing for any service which is not given with a smile of glad thankfulness that we are able to give it.

And for the true acceptableness of Christian service, that motive of thankful love must be actually present in each deed. It is not enough that we should determine on and begin a course of sacrifice or work under the influence of that great motive, unless we renew it at each step. We cannot hallow a row of actions in that wholesale fashion by baptizing the first of them with the cleansing waters of true consecration, while the rest are done from lower motives. Each deed must be sanctified by the presence of the true motive, if it is to be worthy of Christ's acceptance. But there is a constant tendency in all Christian work to slide off its only

right foundation, and, having been begun 'in the spirit,' to be carried on 'in the flesh.' Constant watchfulness is needed to resist this tendency, which, if yielded to, destroys the worth and power, and changes the inmost nature, of apparently devoted and earnest service.

Not the least subtle and dangerous of these spurious motives which steal in surreptitiously to mar our work for Christ is habit. Service done from custom, and representing no present impulse of thankful devotion, may pass muster with us, but does it do so with God? No doubt a habit of godly service is, in some aspects, a good, and it is well to enlist that tremendous power of custom which sways so much of our lives, on the side of godliness. But it is not good, but, on the contrary, pure loss, when habit becomes mechanical, and, instead of making it easier to call up the true motive, excludes that motive, and makes it easy to do the deed without it. I am afraid that if such thoughts were applied as a sieve to sift the abundant so-called Christian work of the present day, there would be an alarming and, to the workers, astonishing quantity of refuse that would not pass the meshes.

Let us, then, try to bring every act of service nominally done for Christ into conscious relation with the motive which ought to be its parent; for only the work that is done because our spirits lift us up, and our hearts are willing, is work that is accepted by Him, and is blessed to us.

And how is that to be secured? How is that glad temper of spontaneous and cheerful consecration to be attained and maintained? I know of but one way. 'Brethren,' said the Apostle, when he was talking about a very little matter—some small collection for a

handful of poor people—‘ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, how that, though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, that we, through His poverty, might become rich.’ Let us keep our eyes fixed upon that great pattern of and motive for surrender; and our hearts will become willing, touched with the fire that flamed in His. There is only one method of securing the gladness and spontaneousness of devotion and of service, and that is, living very near to Jesus Christ, and drinking in for ourselves, as the very wine that turns to blood and life in our veins, the spirit of that dear Master. Every one whose heart is lifted up will have it lifted up because it holds on by Him who hath ascended up, and who, being ‘lifted up, draws all men to Him.’ The secret of consecration is communion with Jesus Christ.

The appeal to lower motives is often tempting, but always a mistake. Continual contact with Jesus Christ, and realisation of what He has done for us, are sure to open the deep fountains of the heart, and to secure abundant streams. If we can tap these perennial reservoirs they will yield like artesian wells, and need no creaking machinery to pump a scanty and intermittent supply. We cannot trust this deepest motive too much, nor appeal to it too exclusively.

Let me remind you, too, that Christ’s appeal to this motive leaves no loophole for selfishness or laziness. Responsibility is all the greater because we are left to assess ourselves. The blank form is sent to us, and He leaves it to our honour to fill it up. Do not tamper with the paper, for remember there is a Returning Officer that will examine your schedule, who knows all about your possessions. So, when He says, ‘Give as you like; and I do not want anything that you do not like,’

remember that 'Give as you like' ought to mean, 'Give as you, who have received everything from Me, are bound to give.'

## II. We get here the measure of acceptable work.

We have a long catalogue, very interesting in many respects, of the various gifts that the people brought. Such sentences as these occur over and over again—'And every man with whom was found' so-and-so 'brought it'; 'And all the women did spin with their hands, and brought that which they had spun'; 'And the rulers brought' so-and-so. Such statements embody the very plain truism that what we have settles what we are bound to give. Or, to put it into grander words, capacity is the measure of duty. Our work is cut out for us by the faculties and opportunities that God has given us.

That is a very easy thing to say, but it is an uncommonly hard thing honestly to apply. For there are plenty of people that are smitten with very unusual humility whenever you begin to talk to them about work. 'It is not in my way,' 'I am not capable of that kind of service,' and so on, and so on. One would believe in the genuineness of the excuse more readily if there were anything about which such people said, 'Well, I *can* do that, at all events'; but such an all-round modesty, which is mostly observable when service is called for, is suspicious. It might be well for some of these retiring and idle Christians to remember the homely wisdom of 'You never know what you can do till you try.' On the other hand, there are many Christians who, for want of honest looking into their own power, for want of what I call sanctified originality, are content to run in the ruts that other people's vehicles have made, without asking

themselves whether that is the gauge that their wheels are fit for. Both these sets of people flagrantly neglect the plain law that what we have settles what we should give.

The form as well as the measure of our service is determined thereby. 'She hath done what she could,' said Jesus Christ about Mary. We often read that, as if it were a kind of apology for a sentimental and useless gift, because it was the best that she could bestow. I do not hear that tone in the words at all. I hear, rather, this, that duty is settled by faculty, and that nobody else has any business to interfere with that which a Christian soul, all aflame with the love of God, finds to be the spontaneous and natural expression of its devotion to the Master. The words are the vindication of the form of loving service; but let us not forget that they are also a very stringent requirement as to its measure, if it is to please Christ. 'What she could'; the engine must be worked up to the last ounce of pressure that it will stand. All must be got out of it that can be got out of it. Is that the case about us? We talk about hard work for Christ. Have any of us ever worked up to the edge of our capacity? I am afraid that if the principles that lie in this catalogue were applied to us, whether about our gold and silver, or about our more precious spiritual and mental possessions, *we could not say*, 'Every man with whom was found' this, that, and the other, 'brought it for the work.'

III. Notice, again, how in this list of offerings there comes out the great thought of the infinite variety of forms of service and offering, which are all equally needful and equally acceptable.

The list begins with 'bracelets, and earrings, and

rings, and tablets, all jewels of gold.' And then it goes on to 'blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen, and red skins of rams, and badgers' skins, and slittim wood.' And then we read that the 'women did spin' with their hands, and brought that which they had spun—namely, the same things as have been already catalogued, 'the blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen.' That looks as if the richer gave the raw material, and the women gave the labour. Poor women! they could not give, but they could spin. They had no stores, but they had ten fingers and a distaff, and if some neighbour found the stuff, the ten fingers joyfully set the distaff twirling, and spun the yarn for the weavers. Then there were others who willingly undertook the rougher work of spinning, not dainty thread for the rich soft stuffs whose colours were to glow in the sanctuary, but the coarse black goat's hair which was to be made into the heavy covering of the roof of the tabernacle. No doubt it was less pleasant labour than the other, but it got done by willing hands. And then, at the end of the whole enumeration, there comes, 'And the rulers brought precious stones, and spices, and oil,' and all the expensive things that were needed. The large subscriptions are at the bottom of the list, and the smaller ones are in the place of honour. All this just teaches us this—what a host of things of all degrees of preciousness in men's eyes go to make God's great building!

So various were the requirements of the work on hand. Each man's gift was needed, and each in its place was equally necessary. The jewels on the high-priest's breastplate were no more nor less essential than the wood that made some peg for a curtain, or than the cheap goat's-hair yarn that was woven into the



coarse cloth flung over the roof of the Tabernacle to keep the wet out. All had equal consecration, because all made one whole. All was equally precious, if all was given with the same spirit. So there is room for all sorts of work in Christ's great house, where there are not only 'vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth,' and all 'unto honour . . . meet for the Master's use.' The smallest deed that co-operates to a great end is great. 'The more feeble are necessary.' Every one may find a corner where his special possession will work into the general design. If I have no jewels to give, I can perhaps find some shittim wood, or, if I cannot manage even that, I can at least spin some other person's yarn, even though I have only a distaff, and not a loom to weave it in. Many of us can do work only when associated with others, and can render best service by helping some more highly endowed. But all are needed, and welcomed, and honoured, and rewarded. The owner of all the slaves sets one to be a water-carrier, and another to be his steward. It is of little consequence whether the servant be Paul or Timothy, the Apostle or the Apostle's helper. 'He worketh the work of the Lord, as I also do,' said the former about the latter. All who are associated in the same service are on one level.

I remember once being in the treasury of a royal palace. There was a long gallery in which the Crown valuables were stored. In one compartment there was a great display of emeralds, and diamonds, and rubies, and I know not what, that had been looted from some Indian rajah or other. And in the next case there lay a common quill pen, and beside it a little bit of discoloured coarse serge. The pen had signed some important treaty, and the serge was a fragment of a

flag that had been borne triumphant from a field where a nation's destinies had been sealed. The two together were worth a farthing at the outside, but they held their own among the jewels, because they spoke of brain-work and bloodshed in the service of the king. Many strangely conjoined things lie side by side in God's jewel-cases. Things which people vulgarly call large and valuable, and what people still more vulgarly call small and worthless, have a way of getting together there. For in that place the arrangement is not according to what the thing would fetch if it were sold, but what was the thought in the mind and the emotion in the heart which gave it. Jewels and camel's hair yarn and gold and silver are all massed together. Wood is wanted for the Temple quite as much as gold and silver and precious stones.

So, whatever we have, let us bring that; and whatever we are, let us bring that. If we be poor and our work small, and our natures limited, and our faculties confined, it does not matter. A man is accepted 'according to that he hath, and not according to that he hath not.' God does not ask how much we have given or done, if we have given or done what we could. But He does ask how much we have kept back, and takes strict account of the unsundered possessions, the unimproved opportunities, the unused powers. He gives much who gives all, though his all be little; he gives little who gives a part, though the part be much. The motive sanctifies the act, and the completeness of the consecration magnifies it. 'Great' and 'small' are not words for God's Kingdom, in which the standard is not quantity but quality, and quality is settled by the purity of the love which prompts the deed, and the consequent thoroughness of self-surrender which it

expresses. Whoever serves God with a whole heart will render to Him a whole strength, and will thus bring Him the gifts which He most desires.

### THE COPIES OF THINGS IN THE HEAVENS

'And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 2. On the first day of the first month shalt thou set up the tabernacle of the tent of the congregation. 3. And thou shalt put therein the ark of the testimony, and cover the ark with the vail. 4. And thou shalt bring in the table, and set in order the things that are to be set in order upon it; and thou shalt bring in the candlestick, and light the lamps thereof. 5. And thou shalt set the altar of gold for the incense before the ark of the testimony, and put the hanging of the door to the tabernacle. 6. And thou shalt set the altar of the burnt offering before the door of the tabernacle of the tent of the congregation. 7. And thou shalt set the laver between the tent of the congregation and the altar, and shalt put water therein. 8. And thou shalt set up the court round about, and hang up the hanging at the court gate. 9. And thou shalt take the anointing oil, and anoint the tabernacle, and all that is therein, and shalt hallow it, and all the vessels thereof: and it shall be holy. 10. And thou shalt anoint the altar of the burnt offering, and all his vessels, and sanctify the altar: and it shall be an altar most holy. 11. And thou shalt anoint the laver and his foot, and sanctify it. 12. And thou shalt bring Aaron and his sons unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and wash them with water. 13. And thou shalt put upon Aaron the holy garments, and anoint him, and sanctify him; that he may minister unto me in the priest's office. 14. And thou shalt bring his sons, and clothe them with coats: 15. And thou shalt anoint them, as thou didst anoint their father, that they may minister unto me in the priest's office; for their anointing shall surely be an everlasting priesthood throughout their generations. 16. Thus did Moses: according to all that the Lord commanded him, so did he.'—**EXODUS xl. 1-16.**

THE Exodus began on the night after the fourteenth day of the first month. The Tabernacle was set up on the first day of the first month; that is, one year, less a fortnight, after the Exodus. Exodus xix. 1 shows that the march to Sinai took nearly three months; and if to this we add the eighty days of Moses' seclusion on the mountain, we get about six months as occupied in preparing the materials for the Tabernacle 'Setting it up' was a short process, done in a day. The time specified was ample to get ready a wooden framework of small dimensions, with some curtains

and coverings of woven-stuffs. What a glad stir there would be in the camp on that New Year's day, when the visible token of God's dwelling in its midst first stood there! Our present purpose is simply to try to bring out the meaning of the Tabernacle and its furniture. It was both a symbol and a type; that is, it expressed in material form certain great religious needs and truths; and, just because it did so, it pointed onwards to the full expression and satisfaction of these in Christ Jesus and His gifts. In other words, it was a parable of the requisites for, and the blessings of, communion with God.

Note, then, first, the general lesson of the Tabernacle as a whole. Its name declares its meaning, 'the tent of meeting' (Rev. Ver.). It was the meeting-place of God with man, as the name is explained in Exodus xxix. 42, 'where I will meet with you, to speak there unto thee.' It is also named simply 'the dwelling'; that is, of God. It was pitched in the midst of the camp, like the tent of the king with his subjects clustered round him. Other nations had temples, like the solemn structures of Egypt; but this slight, movable sanctuary was a new thing, and spoke of the continual presence of Israel's God, and of His loving condescension in sharing their wandering lives, and, like them, dwelling 'within curtains.' It was a visible representation of a spiritual fact for the then present; it was a parable of the inmost reality of communion between man and God; and it was, therefore, a prophecy both of the full realisation of His presence among men, in the temple of Christ's body, and of the yet future communion of Heaven, which is set before us by the 'great voice . . . saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men.'

The threefold division into court of the worshippers, holy place for the priests, and holiest of all, was not peculiar to the Tabernacle. It signifies the separation which, after all nearness, must still exist. God is unrevealed after all revelation; afar off, however near; shrouded in the utter darkness of the inmost shrine, and only approached by the priestly intercessor with the blood of the sacrifice. Like all the other arrangements of the Sanctuary, the division of its parts declares a permanent truth, which has impressed itself on the worship of all nations; and it reveals God's way of meeting the need by outward rites for the then present, and by the mediation of the great High-Priest in the time to come, whose death rent the veil, and whose life will, one day, make the holiest place in the heavens patent to our feet.

The enumeration of the furniture of the Tabernacle starts from the innermost shrine, and goes outward. It was fit that it should begin with God's special abode. The 'holy of holies' was a tiny chamber, closed in from light, the form, dimensions, materials, and furniture of which were all significant. It measured ten cubits, or fifteen feet, every way, thereby expressing, in its cubical form and in the predominance of the number ten, stability and completeness. It will be remembered that the same cubical form is given to the heavenly city, in the Apocalypse, for the same reason. There, in the thick darkness, unseen by mortals except for the one approach of the high-priest on the day of atonement, dwelt the 'glory' which made light in the darkness, and flashed on the gold which covered all things in the small shrine.

Our lesson does not speak of cherubim or mercy-seat, but specifies only the ark of the testimony. This was

a small chest of acacia wood, overlaid with gold, and containing the two tables of the law, which were called the testimony, as bearing witness to Israel of God's will concerning their duty, and as therein bearing witness, too, of what He is. Nor must the other part of the witness-bearing of the law be left out of view,—that it testifies against the transgressors of itself. The ark was the centre-point of the divine revelation, the very throne of God; and it is profoundly significant that its sole contents should be the tables of stone. Egyptian arks contained symbols of their gods, degrading, bestial, and often impure; but the true revelation was a revelation, to the moral sense, of a Being who loves righteousness. Other faiths had their mysteries, whispered in the inmost shrine, which shunned the light of the outer courts; but here the revelation within the veil was the same as that spoken on the house-tops. Our lesson does not refer to the 'mercy seat,' which covered the ark above, and spoke the need for, and the provision of, a means whereby the witness of the law against the worshipper's sins should be, as it were, hid from the face of the enthroned God. The veil which is referred to in verse 3 was that which hung between the holy of holies and the holy place. It did not 'cover the ark,' as the Authorised Version unfortunately renders, but 'screened' it, as the Revised Version correctly gives it. It blazed with colour and embroidered figures of cherubim. No doubt, the colours were symbolical; but it is fancy, rather than interpretation, which seeks meanings beyond splendour in the blue and purple and crimson and white which were blended in its gorgeous folds. What is it which hangs, in ever-shifting hues, between man and God? The veil of creation, embroidered by

His own hand with beauty and life, which are symbolised in the cherubim, the types of the animate creation. The two divisions of the Tabernacle, thus separated by the veil, correspond to earth and heaven; and that application of the symbol is certainly intended, though not exclusively.

We step, then, from the mystery of the inner shrine out to the comparatively inferior sacredness of the 'holy place,' daily trodden by the priests. Three articles stand in it: the table for the so-called shew-bread, the great lampstand, and the golden altar of incense. Of these, the altar was in the midst, right in the path to the holiest place; and on the right, looking to the veil, the table of shew-bread; while on the left was the lampstand. These three pieces of furniture were intimately connected with each other, and represented various aspects of the spiritual character of true worshippers. The holy place was eminently the people's, just as the most holy place was eminently God's. True, only the priests entered it; but they did so on behalf of the nation. We may expect, therefore, to find special reference to the human side of worship in its equipments; and we do find it. Of the three articles, the altar of incense was in idea, as in locality, the centre; and we consider it first, though it stands last in our list, suggesting that, in coming from the most holy place, the other two would be first encountered. The full details of its construction and use are found in Exodus xxx. Twice a day sweet incense was burned on it, and no other kind of sacrifice was permitted; but once a year it was sprinkled, by the high priest, with expiatory blood. The meaning is obvious. The symbolism of incense as representing prayer is frequent in Scripture, and most natural. What could

more beautifully express the upward aspirations of the soul, or the delight of God in these, than the incense sending up its wreaths of fragrant smoke? Incense gives no fragrance nor smoke till it is kindled; and the censer has to be constantly swung to keep up the glow, without which there will be no 'odour of a sweet smell.' So cold prayers are no prayers, but are scentless, and unapt to rise. The heart must be as a coal of fire, if the prayer is to come up before God with acceptance. Twice a day the incense was kindled; and all day long, no doubt, it smouldered, 'a perpetual incense before the Lord.' So, in the life of true communion, there should be daily seasons of special devotion, and a continual glow. The position of the altar of incense was right in the line between the altar of burnt offering, in the outer court, and the entrance to the holiest place; by which we are taught that acceptable prayer follows on reconciliation by sacrifice, and leads into 'the secret place of the Most High.' The yearly atonement for the altar taught that evil imperfection cleaves to all our devotion, which needs and receives the sprinkling of the blood of the great sacrifice.

The great seven-branched candlestick, or lampstand, stood on the right of the altar, as the priest looked to the most holy place. Its meaning is plain. It is an emblem of the Church as recipient and communicative of light, in all the applications of that metaphor, to a dark world. As the sacred lamps streamed out their hospitable rays into the desert all the night, so God's servants are lights in the world. The lamps burned with derived light, which had to be fed as well as kindled. So we are lighted by the touch of the great Aaron, and His gentle hand tends the smoking wick,



and nourishes it to a flame. We need the oil of the Spirit to sustain the light. The lamp was a clustered light, representing in its metal oneness the formal and external unity of Israel. The New Testament unity is of a better kind. The seven candlesticks are made one because He walks in the midst, not because they are welded on to one stem.

Consistency of symbolism requires that the table of shew-bread should, like the altar and the candlestick, express some phase of true worship. Its interpretation is less obvious than that of the other two. The name means literally 'bread of the face'; that is, bread presented to, and ever lying before, God. There are two explanations of the meaning. One sees in the offering only a devout recognition of God as the author of material blessing, and a rendering to Him of His gifts of outward nourishment. In this case, the shew-bread would be anomalous, a literality thrust into the midst of symbolism. The other explanation keeps up the congruity, by taking the material bread, which is the result of God's blessing on man's toil, as a symbol of the spiritual results of God's blessing on man's spiritual toil, or, in other words, of practical righteousness or good works, and conceives that these are offered to God, by a strong metaphor, as acceptable food. It is a bold representation, but we may quote 'I will sup with him' as proof that it is not inadmissible; and it is not more bold than the declaration that our obedience is 'an odour of a sweet smell.' So the three pieces of furniture in the holy place spoke of the true Israel, when cleansed by sacrifice and in communion with God, as instant in prayer, continually raying out the light derived from Him, and zealous of good works, well-pleasing to God.

We pass outwards, through another veil, and stand in the court, which was always open to the people. There, before the door of the Tabernacle, was the altar of burnt offering. The order of our chapter brings us to it last, but the order of worship brought the worshipper to it first. Its distinctive character was that on it the blood of the slain sacrifices was offered. It was the place where sinful men could begin to meet with God, the foundation of all the communion of the inner sanctuary. We need not discuss mere details of form and the like. The great lesson taught by the altar and its place, is that reconciliation is needed, and is only possible by sacrifice. As a symbol it taught every Israelite what his own conscience, once awakened, endorsed, that sin must be expiated before the sinner and God can walk in concord. As prophecy, it assured those whose hearts were touched with longing, that God would Himself 'provide the lamb for the burnt offering,' in some way as yet unknown. For us it is an intended prefiguration of the great work of Jesus Christ. 'We have an altar.' We need that altar at the beginning of our fellowship with God, as much as Israel did. A Christianity which does not start from the altar of burnt offering will never get far into the holy place, nor ever reach that innermost shrine where the soul lives and adores, silent before the manifest God between the cherubim.

The laver, or basin, was intended for the priests' use, in washing hands and feet before ministering at the altar or entering the tabernacle. It teaches the necessity for purity, in order to priestly service.

Thus these three divisions of the Tabernacle and its court set forth the stages in the approach of the soul to God, beginning with the reconciling sacrifice and

cleansing water, advancing to closer communion by prayer, impartation of light received, and offering of good works to God, and so entering within the veil into secret sweetnesses of union with God, which attains its completeness only when we pass from the holy place on earth to the most holy in the heavens.

The remainder of the text can only be glanced at in a sentence or two. It consists of two parts: the consecration of the Tabernacle and its vessels by the anointing oil which, when applied to inanimate objects, simply devoted them to sacred uses, and the consecration of Aaron and his sons. A fuller account is given in Leviticus viii., from which we learn that it was postponed to a later period, and accompanied with a more elaborate ritual than that prescribed here. That consists of three parts: washing, as emblematic of communicated purity; robing, and anointing,—the last act signifying, when applied to men, their endowment with so much of the divine Spirit as fitted them for their theocratic functions. These three things made the ‘sanctifying,’ or setting apart for God’s service, of Aaron and his sons. He is consecrated alone, in order that his primacy may be clearly indicated. He is consecrated by Moses as the higher; then the sons are consecrated with the same ceremonial, to indicate the hereditary priesthood, and the equality of Aaron’s successors with himself. ‘They truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death,’ and provision for their brief tenure of office was embodied in the consecration of the sons by the side of the father. Their priesthood was only ‘everlasting’ by continual succession of short-lived holders of the office. But the

prediction which closes the text has had a fulfilment beyond these fleeting, shadowy priests, in Him whose priesthood is 'everlasting' and 'throughout all generations,' because 'He ever liveth to make intercession' (Heb. vii. 25).

## THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS

### THE BURNT OFFERING A PICTURE AND A PROPHECY

\* And the Lord called unto Moses, and spake unto him out of the tabernacle of the congregation, saying, 2. Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, If any man of you bring an offering unto the Lord, ye shall bring your offering of the cattle, even of the herd, and of the flock. 3. If his offering be a burnt-sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish: he shall offer it of his own voluntary will, at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the Lord. 4. And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt-offering; and it shall be accepted for him, to make atonement for him. 5. And he shall kill the bullock before the Lord; and the priests, Aaron's sons, shall bring the blood, and sprinkle the blood round about upon the altar that is by the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. 6. And he shall flay the burnt offering, and cut it into his pieces. 7. And the sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire upon the altar, and lay the wood in order upon the fire: 8. And the priests, Aaron's sons, shall lay the parts, the head, and the fat, in order upon the wood that is on the fire which is upon the altar: 9. But his inwards and his legs shall he wash in water; and the priest shall burn all on the altar, to be a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the Lord.'—LEV. i. 1-9.

IN considering the Jewish sacrificial system, it is important to distinguish the symbolical from the typical value of the sacrifices. The former could scarcely be quite unnoticed by the offerers; but the latter was only gradually made plain, was probably never very generally seen, and is a great deal clearer to us, in the light of Christ, the Antitype, than it could ever have been before His coming. As symbols, the sacrifices expressed great eternal truths as to spiritual worship and communion, its hindrances, Aaron, requisites, manner, and blessings. They were God's picture-book for these children in religious development. As types, they shadowed the work of Jesus Christ and its results.

The value of the sacrifices in either aspect is independent of modern questions as to their Mosaic origin;

for at whatever period the Priest's Code was promulgated, it equally bears witness to the ruling ideas of the offerings, and, in any case, it was long before Christ came, and therefore its prophecy of Him is as supernatural, whether Moses or Ezra were its author. I make this remark, not as implying that the new theory is not revolutionary, but simply as absolving a student of the religious significance of the sacrificial system from entering here on questions of date.

The 'burnt offering' stands first in Leviticus for several reasons. It was derived from patriarchal times; it was offered twice daily, besides frequently on other occasions; and in its significance it expressed the complete consecration which should be the habitual state of the true worshipper. Its name literally means 'that which ascends,' and refers, no doubt, to the ascent of the transformed substance of the sacrifice in fire and smoke, as to God. The central idea of this sacrifice, then, as gathered from its name and confirmed by its manner, is that of the yielding of the whole being in self-surrender, and borne up by the flame of intense consecration to God. Very beautiful is the variety of material which was permitted. The poor man's pair of pigeons went up with as sweet an odour as the rich man's young bull. God delights in the consecration to Him of ourselves and our powers, no matter whether they be great or small, if only the consecration be thorough, and the whole being be wrapped in the transforming blaze.

It is worth while to try to realise the strange and to our eyes repulsive spectacle of the burnt offering, which is veiled from us by its sacred associations. The worshipper leads up his animal by some rude halter, and possibly resisting, to the front of the Tabernacle,

the courts of which he dared not tread, but which was to him the dwelling-place of God. There by the altar he stands, and, first pressing his hand with force on the victim's head, he then, with one swift cut, kills it, and as the warm blood spouts from the mangled throat, the attendant priest catches it in a basin, and, standing at the two diagonally opposite corners of the altar in turn, dashes, with one dexterous twist, half of the contents against each, so as to wet two sides of the altar with one throw, and the other two with the other. The offerer then flays the reeking carcase, tossing the gory hide to the priest as his perquisite, and cuts up the sacrifice according to a fixed method. His part of the work is done, and he stands by with bloody hands while the priests arrange the pieces on the pile on the altar; and soon the odour of burning flesh and the thick smoke hanging over the altar tell that the rite is complete. What a scene it must have been when, as on some great occasions, hundreds of burnt offerings were offered in succession! The place and the attendants would look to us liker shambles and butchers than God's house and worshippers.

Now, if we inquire into the significance of the offering, it turns on two points—expiation and burning. The former it has in common with other bloody sacrifices, though it presents features of its own, even in regard to expiation. But the latter is peculiar to it, and must therefore be taken to be its special teaching. The stages in the whole process are five: the presentation, laying on of hands, slaughter, sprinkling of blood, and burning of the whole carcase. The first three are alike in this and other sacrifices, the fourth is modified here, and the last is found here only. Each has its lesson. The offerer has himself to bring the animal to

the door of the Tabernacle, that he may show his willing surrender of a valuable thing. As he stands there with his offering, his thoughts would pass into the inner shrine, where God dwelt; and he would, if he were a true worshipper, feel that while God, on His part, already dwelt in the midst of the people, he, on the other hand, can only enter into the enjoyment of His presence by sacrifice. The offering was to be 'a male without blemish'; for bodily defect symbolising moral flaw could not be tolerated in the offerings to a holy God, who requires purity, and will not be put off with less than a man's best, be it ox or pigeon. 'The torn and the lame and the sick,' which Malachi charged his generation with bringing, are neither worthy of God to receive nor of us to offer.

When he pressed his hand on the head of the sacrifice, what was the worshipper meant to think? In all other instances where hands are laid on, some transference or communication of gifts or qualities is implied; and it is natural to suppose that the same meaning attaches to the act here, with such modifications as the case requires. We find that it was done in other bloody sacrifices, accompanied with confession. Nothing is said of confession here; but we cannot dismiss the idea that the offerer laid his sins on the victim by that striking act, especially as the very next clause says 'it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.' The atonement was made, as we shall see, by the application of the blood to the altar; but the possibility of the victim's blood atoning for the offerer depended on his having laid his hands on its head. We may perhaps go farther than 'transference of sins.' Might we not widen the expression, and say 'identification,' or, to use a word which has become so worn by religious controversy that it slips



through our fingers unnoticed, 'substitution'? Did not the offerer say in effect, by that act, 'This is I? This animal life shall die, as I ought to die. It shall go up as a sweet savour to Jehovah, as my being should.'

The animal invested with this representative character is next to be slain by the offerer, not by the priest, who only performed that part of the ritual in the case of national or public sacrifices. That was distinctly a vicarious death; and, as inflicted by the hand of the person represented by the animal, he thereby acknowledged that its death was the wages of his sin, and allowed the justice of his condemnation, while he presented this innocent life—innocent because not that of a moral being—as his substitute. So far the worshipper's part goes. But now, when the act of expiation is to be symbolically represented, and, so far as outward sacrifice could, is to be accomplished, another actor appears. The priest comes forward as mediator between God and man, and applies the blood to the altar. The difference between the sprinkling of the blood, in the burnt offerings and in the other sacrifices, which had expiation for their principal object, in some of which it was smeared on the horns of the altar, and, in the most solemn of all, was carried into the holiest place, and sprinkled on the mercy-seat, suggests that the essential character of the burnt offering was not expiatory, though expiation was the foundation on which alone the essential character could be reared. The application of the blood was the formal act by which atonement was made. The word rendered 'to make atonement' means 'to cover'; and the idea conveyed is that the blood, which is the life of the sacrifice, covers the sins of the offerer, so as to make them powerless to dam back the love or to precipitate the wrath of God.

With this act the expiatory portion of the ritual ends, and we may here pause to look back for a moment on it as a whole. We have pointed out the double bearings of the Mosaic ritual as symbolical and as typical or prophetic. In the former aspect, the emphatic teaching of this rite is that 'the wages of sin is death,' that 'without shedding of blood there is no remission,' that God has appointed sacrifice as the means of entering into fellowship with Him, and that substitution and vicarious penalty are facts in His government. We may like or dislike these thoughts; we may call them gross, barbarous, immoral, and the like, but, at all events, we ought not to deny that they are ingrained in the Mosaic sacrificial system, which becomes unmeaning elaboration of empty and often repulsive ceremonies, if they are not recognised as its very centre. Of course, the meaning of the sacrifices was hidden from many a worshipper. They became opaque instead of transparent, and hid the great truth which they were meant to reveal. All forms labour under that disadvantage; but that they were significant in design, and largely so to devout hearts in effect, admits of no reasonable doubt. That which they signified was chiefly the putting away of sin by the sacrifice of innocent life, which stood in the place of the guilty. Of course, too, their benefit was symbolical, and the blood of bulls and goats could never put away sin; but, under the shelter of the outward forms, a more spiritual insight gradually grew up, such as breathes in many a psalm, and such as, we cannot doubt, filled the heart of many a worshipper, as he stood by the bleeding sacrifice on which his own hands had laid the burden that had weighed so heavy on himself. How far the prophetic aspect of the sacrifices

was discerned, is a more difficult question. But this at least we know—that the highest level of evangelical prophecy, in Isaiah's wonderful fifty-third chapter, is reached from this vantage-ground. It is the flower of which these ordinances are the root. We need not enlarge upon the prophetic aspect of the sacrifice. The mere negative sinlessness of the victim points to the 'Lamb without blemish and without spot,' on whom, as Isaiah says, in language dyed through and through with sacrificial references, 'the Lord hath made to meet the iniquity of us all,' and who Himself makes 'His soul an offering for sin.' The modern tendency to bring down the sacrificial system to a late date surely sins against the sacred and all-explaining law of evolution, in the name of which it is attempted, inasmuch as it is an unheard-of thing for the earlier stages of a religion to be less clogged with ceremonial than the later. Psalmist and prophet first, and priest afterwards, is not the order of development.

The remaining part of the ritual was, as we have pointed out, peculiar to the burnt offering. In it alone the whole of the sacrifice was consumed on the altar, with the exceptions of the skin, which was given to the priest, and of the contents of the intestines. Hence it was sometimes called 'a whole burnt offering.' The meaning of this provision may be apprehended if we note that the word rendered 'burn,' in verse 9, is not that which simply implies destruction by fire, but is a peculiar word, reserved for sacrificial burnings, and meaning 'to cause to ascend in smoke or vapour.' The gross flesh was, as it were, refined into vapour and odour, and went up to God as 'a sweet savour.' It expressed, therefore, the transformation of the sinful human nature of the worshipper, by the refining power

of the fire of God, into something more ethereal and kindred with the heaven to which it rose. Or, to put the thought in plainer words, on the basis of expiation, the glad surrender of the whole being is possible and will ensue; and when a man yields himself in joyful self-surrender to the God who has forgiven his sins, then the fire of the divine Spirit is shed abroad in his heart, and kindles a flame which lays hold on all the gross, earthly elements of his being, and changes them into fire, kindred with itself, which aspires, in ruddy tongues of upward-leaping light, to the God to whom the heart has been surrendered, and to whom the whole being tends.

This is the purpose of expiation; this is the summit of all religion. One man has realised to the full, in his life, what the burnt offering taught as the goal for all worshippers. Jesus has lived in the constant exercise of perfect self-surrender, and in the constant unmeasured possession of 'the Spirit of burning,' with which He has come to baptize us all. If we look to Him as our expiation, we should also find in Him the power to yield ourselves 'living sacrifices,' and draw from Him the sacred and refining fire, which shall transform our grossness into His likeness, and make even us 'acceptable to God, through Jesus Christ.'

### STRANGE FIRE

'And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which He commanded them not. 2. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord. 3. Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh Me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace. 4. And Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said unto them, Come near, carry your brethren from before the sanctuary out of the camp. 5. So they went near, and carried them in their coats out of the

camp; as Moses had said. 6. And Moses said unto Aaron, and unto Eleazar and unto Ithamar, his sons, Uncover not your heads, neither rend your clothes; lest ye die, and lest wrath come upon all the people: but let your brethren, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning which the Lord hath kindled. 7. And ye shall not go out from the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die: for the anointing oil of the Lord is upon you. And they did according to the word of Moses. 8. And the Lord spake unto Aaron, saying, 9. Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations; 10. And that ye may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean; 11. And that ye may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the Lord hath spoken unto them by the hand of Moses.—LEV. x. 1-11.

THIS solemn story of sin and punishment is connected with the preceding chapter by a simple 'and.' Probably, therefore, Nadab and Abihu 'offered strange fire,' immediately after the fire from Jehovah had consumed the appointed sacrifice. Their sin was aggravated by the time of its being committed. But a week had passed since the consecration of their father and themselves as priests. The first sacrifices had just been offered, and here, in the very blossoming time, came a vile canker. If such licence in setting aside the prescriptions of the newly established sacrificial order asserted itself then, to what lengths might it not run when the first impression of sanctity and of God's commandment had been worn by time and custom? The sin was further aggravated by the sinners being priests, who were doubly obliged to punctilious adherence to the instituted ritual. If they set the example of contempt, would not the people better (or, rather, worsen) their instruction?

Unquestionably, their punishment was awfully severe. But we shall entirely misconceive their sin if we judge it by our standards. We are not dependent on forms as Israel was, but the spiritual religion of Christianity was only made possible by the externalism of the older system. The sweet kernel would not have softened and become juicy without the shelter of the hard shell. Scaffolding is needed to erect a

building; and he is not a wise man who either despises or would keep permanently standing the scaffold poles.

We draw a broad distinction between positive commandments and moral or religious obligations. But in the Mosaic legislation that distinction does not exist. There, all precepts are God's uttered will, and all disobedience is rebellion against Him. Nor could it be otherwise at the stage of development which Israel had reached.

What, then, was the crime of these two rash sons of Aaron? That involves two questions: What did they do? and What was the sin of doing it? The former question may be answered in various ways. Certainly the designation of 'strange fire' seems best explained by the usual supposition that it means fire not taken from the altar. The other explanations, which make the sin to have been offering at an unauthorised time, or offering incense not compounded according to the prescription, give an unnatural meaning to the phrase. It was the 'fire' which was wrong,—that is, it was 'fire which they had kindled,' caught up from some common culinary hearth, or created by themselves in some way.

What was their sin in thus offering it? Plainly, the narrative points to the essence of the crime in calling it 'fire which He had not commanded.' So this was their crime, that they were tampering with the appointed order which but a week before they had been consecrated to conserve and administer; that they were thus thrusting in self-will and personal caprice, as of equal authority with the divine commandment; that they were arrogating the right to cut and carve God's appointments, as the whim or excitement of the moment dictated; and that they were doing their best

to obliterate the distinction on the preservation of which religion, morality, and the national existence depended; namely, the distinction between holy and common, clean and unclean. To plough that distinction deep into the national consciousness was no small part of the purpose of the law; and here were two of its appointed witnesses disregarding it, and flying in its face. The flash of holy fire consuming the sacrifices had scarcely faded off their eyeballs when they thus sinned.

They have had many successors, not only in Israel, while a ritual demanding punctilious conformity lasted, but in Christendom since. Alas! our censers are often flaming with 'strange fire.' How much so-called Christian worship glows with self-will or with partisan zeal! When we seek to worship God for what we can get, when we rush into His presence with hot, eager desires which we have not subordinated to His will, we are burning 'strange fire which He has not commanded.' The only fire which should kindle the incense in our censers, and send it up to heaven in fragrant wreaths, is fire caught from the altar of sacrifice. God must kindle the flame in our hearts if we are to render these else cold hearts to Him.

'The prayers I bring will then be sweet indeed  
If Thou the Spirit give, by which I pray.'

The swift, terrible punishment does indeed bear marks of the severity of that earlier stage of revelation. But it was not disproportioned to the offence, and it was not the cruelty of a martinet who avenged ceremonial lapses with penalties which should have been kept for moral offences. The surface of the sin was ceremonial impropriety; the heart of it was flout-

ing Jehovah and His law. It was better that two men should die, and the whole nation perish not, as it would have done if their example had been followed. It is mercy to trample out the first sparks beside a powder-barrel.

There is a very striking parallel between verse 2 and the last verse of the preceding chapter. In both the same expression is used, 'There came forth fire from before the Lord, and consumed' (the word rendered *devoured* in verse 2 is the same in Hebrew as *consumed*). So, then, the same divine fire, which had graciously signified God's acceptance of the appointed sacrifice, now flashed out with lightning-like power of destruction, and killed the two rebel priests. There is dormant potency of destruction in the God who reveals Himself as gracious. The 'wrath of the Lamb' is as real as His gentleness. The Gospel is 'the savour of life unto life' and 'of death unto death.'

Moses' word to the stunned father is of a piece with the severity of the whole incident. No voice of condolence or sympathy comes from him. The brother is swallowed up in the lawgiver. He puts into words the meaning of the terrible stroke, and expects Aaron to acquiesce, though his heart bleeds. What was his interpretation? He saw in it God's purpose to be 'sanctified in them that come nigh Him.' The priests were these. Nadab and Abihu had been consecrated for the purpose of enforcing the truth of God's holiness. They had done the very opposite, by breaking down the distinction between sacred and common.

But their nearness to God brought with it not only corresponding obligations, but corresponding criminality and penalty, if these obligations were not discharged. If God is not 'sanctified' by His servants, He



will sanctify Himself *on* them. If His people do not set forth His infinite separation from all evil and elevation above all creatures, He will proclaim these truths in lightning that kills and thunder that roars. It is a universal law which Moses sternly spoke to Aaron instead of comfort, bidding him recognise the necessity of the fearful blow to his paternal heart. 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.'

The prohibition to Aaron and his sons to show signs of mourning is as stern as the rest of the story, and serves to insist upon the true point of view from which to regard it. For the official representatives of the divine order of worship to mourn the deaths of its assailants would have seemed to indicate their murmuring at God's judgments, and might have led them to participate in the sin while they lamented its punishment. It is hard to mourn and not to repine. Affection blinds to the ill-desert of its objects. Nadab's and Abihu's stark corpses lying in the forecourt of the sanctuary, and Aaron's dry eyes and undisturbed attire, proclaim the same truths,—the gravity of the dead men's sin, and the righteous judgment of God. But the people might sorrow, for *their* mourning would help to imprint on them more deeply the lessons of the dread event.

While the victims' cousins carried their bodies to their graves in the sand, their father and brothers had to remain in the Tabernacle, because 'the anointing oil of Jehovah is upon you.' That oil, as the symbol of the Spirit, separates those on whom it is poured from all contact with death, from participation in sin, from the weight of sorrow. What have immortality, righteousness, joy in the Holy Ghost, to do with these dark

shadows? Those whom God has called to His immediate service must hold themselves apart from earthly passions, and must control natural affection, if indulging it imperils their clear witness to God's righteous will.

The prohibition (verses 8-11) of wine and strong drink during the discharge of the priestly functions seems to suggest that Nadab and Abihu had committed their sin while in some degree intoxicated. Be that as it may, the prohibition is rested upon the necessity of preserving, in all its depth and breadth, the distinction between common and holy which Nadab and Abihu had broken down. That distinction was to be very present to the priest in his work, and how could he have the clearness of mind, the collectedness and composure, the sense of the sanctity of his office, and ministrations which it requires and gives, if he was under the influence of strong drink?

Nothing has more power to blur the sharpness of moral and religious insight than even a small amount of alcohol. God must be worshipped with clear brain and naturally beating heart. Not the fumes of wine, in which there lurks almost necessarily the tendency to 'excess,' but the being 'filled with the Spirit' supplies the only legitimate stimulus to devotion. Besides the personal reason for abstinence, there was another,—namely, that only so could the priests teach the people 'the statutes' of Jehovah. Lips stained from the wine-cup would not be fit to speak holy words. Words spoken by such would carry no power.

God's servants can never impress on the sluggish conscience of society their solemn messages from God, unless they are conspicuously free from self-indulgence, and show by their example the gulf, wide as between

heaven and hell, which parts cleanness from uncleanness. Our lives must witness to the eternal distinction between good and evil, if we are to draw men to 'abhor that which is evil, and cleave to that which is good.'

### THE FIRST STAGE IN THE LEPER'S CLEANSING

'And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 2. This shall be the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing: He shall be brought unto the priest: 3. And the priest shall go forth out of the camp; and the priest shall look, and, behold, if the plague of leprosy be healed in the leper; 4. Then shall the priest command to take for him that is to be cleansed two birds alive and clean, and cedar-wood, and scarlet, and hyssop: 5. And the priest shall command that one of the birds be killed in an earthen vessel over running water: 6. As for the living bird, he shall take it, and the cedar-wood, and the scarlet, and the hyssop, and shall dip them and the living bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the running water: 7. And he shall sprinkle upon him that is to be cleansed from the leprosy seven times, and shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the living bird loose into the open field.'—LEV. xiv. 1-7.

THE whole treatment of leprosy is parabolic. Leprosy itself is a 'parable of death.' The horrible loathsomeness, the contagiousness, the non-curableness, etc. So the man was shut out from camp and from sanctuary. There was a double process in the cleansing rite, restoring to each.

I. Sketch the ceremonial. Two birds, one slain over a vessel of water so that its blood drained in. Then the living bird was to be dipped into this water and blood, along with cedar, scarlet, and hyssop, and the man sprinkled seven times and the living bird set loose.

II. The significance. This elaborate symbolism was partly intelligible even then. Two birds, like the two goats on the Atonement Day. Did both in some sense symbolise the man? The first one was not exactly a sacrifice. Its death points to the physical death which was the end of the disease, but also in some

sense its death symbolised the death by which cleansing was secured.

(a) The purifying water is made by blood added to it, *i.e.* cleansing by sacrifice.

‘By water and by blood.’

(b) The sevenfold sprinkling. The cedar, symbol of incorruptibility; the scarlet, of full vital energy; the hyssop, of purifying. So the thought was suggested of the communication of cleansing, full health and incorruption, undecaying strength; all physical contrasts to leprosy sevenfold.

(c) The free, glad activity. The freed bird. The restored leper.

### THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

‘And the Lord spake unto Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron when they offered before the Lord, and died; 2. And the Lord said unto Moses, Speak unto Aaron thy brother, that he come not at all times into the holy place within the vail before the mercy-seat, which is upon the ark; that he die not: for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy-seat. 3. Thus shall Aaron come into the holy place; with a young bullock for a sin offering, and a ram for a burnt offering. 4. He shall put on the holy linen coat, and he shall have the linen breeches upon his flesh, and shall be girded with a linen girdle, and with the linen mitre shall he be attired: these are holy garments; therefore shall he wash his flesh in water, and so put them on. 5. And he shall take of the congregation of the children of Israel two kids of the goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering. 6. And Aaron shall offer his bullock of the sin offering, which is for himself, and make an atonement for himself, and for his house. 7. And he shall take the two goats, and present them before the Lord at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. 8. And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats; one lot for the Lord, and the other lot for the scapegoat. 9. And Aaron shall bring the goat upon which the Lord's lot fell, and offer him for a sin offering: 10. But the goat, on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat, shall be presented alive before the Lord, to make an atonement with Him, and to let him go for a scapegoat into the wilderness. 11. And Aaron shall bring the bullock of the sin offering which is for himself, and shall make an atonement for himself, and for his house, and shall kill the bullock of the sin offering which is for himself. 12. And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the Lord, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the vail: 13. And he shall put the incense upon the fire before the Lord, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy-seat that is upon the testimony, that he die not: 14. And he shall take of the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it with his finger upon the mercy-seat eastward; and before the mercy-seat shall he sprinkle of the blood with his finger seven times. 15. Then shall he kill the goat of the sin offering, that is for the people, and bring his blood within the vail, and do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it upon the mercy-seat, and before the mercy-seat. 16. And he shall make an atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their

transgressions in all their sins: and so shall he do for the tabernacle of the congregation, that remaineth among them in the midst of their uncleanness. 17. And there shall be no man in the tabernacle of the congregation when he goeth in to make an atonement in the holy place, until he come out, and have made an atonement for himself, and for his household, and for all the congregation of Israel. 18. And he shall go out unto the altar that is before the Lord, and make an atonement for it; and shall take of the blood of the bullock, and of the blood of the goat, and put it upon the horns of the altar round about. 19. And he shall sprinkle of the blood upon it with his finger seven times, and cleanse it, and hallow it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel.'—LEV. xvi. 1-19.

THE Talmudical treatise on the ritual of the day of atonement is entitled 'Yoma,' *the day*, which sufficiently expresses its importance in the series of sacrificial observances. It was the confession of the incompleteness of them all, a ceremonial proclamation that ceremonies do not avail to take away sin; and it was also a declaration that the true end of worship is not reached till the worshipper has free access to the holy place of the Most High. Thus the prophetic element is the very life-breath of this supreme institution of the old covenant, which therein acknowledges its own defects, and feeds the hopes of a future better thing. We do not here consider the singular part of the ritual of the Day of Atonement which is concerned with the treatment of the so-called 'scapegoat,' but confine ourselves to the consideration of that part of it which was observed in the Tabernacle and was intended to expiate the sins of the priesthood and of the people. The chapter connects the rites of the Day of Atonement with the tragic death of the sons of Aaron, which witnessed to the sanctity of the inner shrine, as not to be trodden but with the appointed offerings by the appointed priest; and so makes the whole a divinely given instruction as to the means by which, and the objects for which, Aaron may enter within the veil.

I. In verses 3-10 we have the preliminaries of the sacrifices and a summary of the rites. First, Aaron was to bathe, and then to robe himself in pure white.

The dress is in singular contrast to the splendour of his usual official costume, in which he stood before men as representing God, and evidently signifies the purity which alone fits for entrance into the awful presence. Thus vested, he brings the whole of the animals to be sacrificed to the altar,—namely, for himself and his order, a bullock and a ram; for the people, two goats and a ram. The goats are then taken by him to the door of the tent,—and it is to be observed that they are spoken of as both constituting one sin offering (v. 5). They therefore both belong to the Lord, and are, in some important sense, one, as was recognised by the later Rabbinical prescription that they should be alike in colour, size, and value. The appeal to the lot was an appeal to God to decide the parts they were respectively to sustain in a transaction which, in both parts, was really one. The consideration of the meaning of the ritual for the one which was led away may be postponed for the present. The preliminaries end with the casting of the lots, and in later times, with tying the ominous red fillet on the head of the dumb creature for which so weird a fate was in store.

II. The first part of the ritual proper (vs. 11-14) is the expiation for the sins of Aaron and the priesthood, and his entrance into the most holy place. The bullock was slain in the usual manner of the sin offering, but its blood was destined for a more solemn use. The white-robed priest took a censer of burning embers from the altar before the tent-door, and two hands full of incense, and, thus laden, passed into the Tabernacle. How the silent crowd in the outer court would watch the last flutter of the white robe as it was lost in the gloom within! He passed through the holy place,

which, on every day but this, was the limit of his approach; but, on this one day, he lifted the curtain, and entered the dark chamber, where the glory flashed from the golden walls and rested above the ark. Would not his heart beat faster as he laid his hand on the heavy veil, and caught the first gleam of the calm light from the Shechinah? As soon as he entered, he was to cast the incense into the censer, that the fragrant cloud might cover the mercy-seat. Incense is the symbol of prayer, and that curling cloud is a picture of the truth that the purest of men, even the anointed priest, robed in white, who has offered sacrifices daily all the year round, and to-day has anxiously obeyed all the commands of ceremonial cleanliness, can yet only draw near to God as a suppliant, not entering there as having a right of access, but beseeching entrance as undeserved mercy. The incense did not cover 'the glory' that Aaron might not gaze upon it, but it covered him that Jehovah might not look on his sin. It would appear that, between verse 13 and verse 14, Aaron's leaving the most holy place to bring the blood of the sacrifice must be understood. If so, we can fancy the long-drawn sigh of relief with which the waiting worshippers saw him return, and carry back into the shrine the expiating blood. The 'most holy place' would still be filled and its atmosphere thick with the incense fumes when he returned to perform the solemn expiation for himself and the whole priestly order. Once the blood was sprinkled on the mercy-seat, and seven times, apparently, on the ground in front of it. The former act was intended, as seems probable, to make atonement for the sins of the priesthood; the latter, to cleanse the sanctuary from the ideal defilements arising from their defective and sinful ministrations.

This completed the part of the ceremonial which belonged immediately to Aaron and the priests. It carries important lessons. Could there be a more striking exhibition of their imperfect realisation of the idea of the priestly office? Observe the anomaly inherent in the very necessity of the case. Aaron was dressed in the white robes emblematic of purity; he had partaken in the benefit of, and had himself offered, sacrifices all the year round. So far as ritual could go, he was pure, and yet so stained with sin that he dared not enter into the divine presence without that double safeguard of the incense and the blood. The priest who cleanses others is himself unclean, and he and his fellows have tainted the sanctuary by the very services which were meant to atone and to purify. That solemn ritual is intended to teach priest and people alike, that every priest 'taken from among men' fails in his office, and pollutes the temple instead of purifying the worshipper. But the office was God's appointment, and therefore would not always be filled by men too small and sinful for its requirements. There must somewhere and somewhen be a priest who will be one indeed, fulfilling the divine ideal of the functions, and answering the deep human longings which have expressed themselves in all lands, for one, pure with no ceremonial but a real purity, to bring us to God and God to us, to offer sacrifice which shall need no after atonement to expiate its defects, and to stand without incense or blood of sprinkling for himself in the presence of God for us. The imperfections of the human holders of the Old Testament offices, whether priest, prophet, or king, were no less prophecies than their positive qualifications were. Therefore, when we see Aaron passing into the holy



place, we see the dim shadow of Christ, who 'needeth not to make atonement' for His own sins, and is our priest 'for ever.'

III. The ritual for the atonement of the sins of the people follows. The two goats had been, during all this time, standing at the door of the Tabernacle. We have already pointed out that they are to be considered as one sacrifice. There are two of them, for the same reason, as has been often remarked, as there were two birds in the ritual of cleansing the leper; namely, because one animal could not represent the two parts of the one whole truth which they are meant to set forth. The one was sacrificed as a sin offering, and the other led away into a solitary land. Here we consider the meaning of the former only, which presents no difficulty. It is a sin offering for the people, exactly corresponding to that just offered for the priests. The same use is made of the blood, which is once sprinkled by Aaron on the mercy-seat and seven times on the ground before it, as in the former case. It is not, however, all employed there, but part of it is carried out into the other divisions of the Tabernacle; and first, the holy place, which the priests daily entered and which is called in verse 16 'the tent of meeting,' and next, the altar of burnt offering in the outer court, are in like manner sprinkled seven times with the blood, to 'hallow' them 'from the uncleanness of the children of Israel' (verse 19). The teaching of this rite, in its bearing upon the people, is similar to that of the previous priestly expiation. The insufficiency of sacrificial cleansing is set forth by this annual atonement for sins which had all been already atoned for. The defects of a ritual worship are proclaimed by the ritual

which cleanses the holy places from the uncleanness contracted by them from the worshippers. If the altar, the seat of expiation, itself needed expiation, how imperfect its worth must be! If the cleansing fountain is foul, how shall it be cleansed, or how shall it cleanse the offerers? The bearing of the blood of expiation into the most holy place, where no Israelite ever entered, save the high priest, taught that the true expiation could only be effected by one who should pass into the presence of God, and leave the door wide open for all to enter. For surely the distance between the worshippers and the mercy-seat was a confession of imperfection; and the entrance there of the representative of the sinful people was the holding out of a dim hope that in some fashion, yet unknown, the veil would be rent, and true communion be possible for the humble soul. The Epistle to the Hebrews tells us where we are to look for the realities of which these ceremonies were the foreshadowings. The veil was rent at the crucifixion. Christ has gone into 'the secret place of the Most High,' and if we love Him, our hearts have gone with Him, and our lives are 'hid with Him, in God.'

### 'THE SCAPEGOAT'

'And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited. . . .—LEV. xvi. 22.

THE import of the remarkable treatment of this goat does not depend on the interpretation of the obscure phrase rendered in the Authorised Version 'for the scapegoat.' Leaving that out of sight for the moment, we observe that the two animals were one sacrifice, and that the transaction with the living

one was the completion of that with the slain. The sins of the congregation, which had been already expiated by the sacrifice, were laid by the high priest on the head of the goat, which was then sent away into the wilderness that he might 'bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited' (v. 22). Nothing depends on the fate of the goat, though, in after times, it was forced over a precipice and so killed. The carrying away of expiated sin, and not the destruction of unexpiated sinners, is the meaning of the impressive rite, and, had it been possible, the same goat that was sacrificed would have been sent into the desert. As that could not be done, an ideal unity was established between the two: the one sacrificed represented the fact of expiation, the one driven away represented the consequences of expiation in the complete removal of sin. The expiation was made 'within the veil'; but a visible token of its completeness was given to help feeble faith, in the blessed mystery of the unseen propitiation. What was divided in the symbol between the twin goats is all done by the one Sacrifice, who has entered into the holiest of all, at once Priest and Sacrifice, and with His own blood made expiation for sin, and has likewise carried away the sin of the world into a land of forgetfulness, whence it never can return.

The clear meaning of the rite is thus obtained, whatever be the force of the difficult phrase already referred to. 'Scapegoat' is certainly wrong. But it may be questioned whether the Revised Version is right in retaining the Hebrew word untranslated, and, by putting a capital letter to it, marking it as a proper name ('for Azazel'). The word occurs only here, so that we have no help from other passages. It seems

to come from a root meaning 'to drive away,' and those who take it to be a proper name, generally suppose it to refer to some malignant spirit, or to Satan, and interpret it as meaning 'a fiend whom one drives away,' or, sometimes, 'who drives away.' The vindication of such an interpretation is supposed to lie in the necessity of finding a complete antithesis in the phrase to the 'for Jehovah' of the previous clause in verse 8. But it is surely sacrificing a good deal to rhetorical propriety to drag in an idea so foreign to the Pentateuch, and so opposed to the plain fact, that both goats were one sin offering (v. 5), in order to get a pedantically correct antithesis. In the absence of any guidance from usage, certainty as to the meaning of the word is unattainable. But there seems no reason, other than that of the said antithesis, against taking it to mean removal or dismissal, rather than 'a remover.' The Septuagint translates it in both ways: as a person in verse 8, and as 'sending away' in verse 10. If the latter meaning be adopted, then the word just defines the same purpose as is given more at length in verse 22, namely, the carrying away of the sins of the congregation. The logical imperfection of the opposition in verse 8 would then be simply enough solved by the fact that while both goats were 'for the Lord,' one was destined to be actually offered in sacrifice, and the other to be 'for dismissal.' The incomplete contrast testifies to the substantial unity of the two, and needs no introduction, into the most sacred rite of the old covenant, of a ceremony which looks liker demon-worship than a parable of the great expiation for a world's sins.

The question for us is, What spiritual ideas are contained in this Levitical symbolism? There is signified,

surely, the condition of approach to God. Remember how the Israelites had impressed on their minds the awful sanctity of 'within the veil.' The inmost shrine was trodden once a year only by the high priest, and only after anxious lustrations and when clothed in pure garments, he entered 'with sacrifice and incense lest he die.' This ritual was for a gross and untutored age, but the men of that age were essentially like ourselves, and we have the same sins and spiritual necessities as they had.

The two goats are regarded as *one* sacrifice. They are a 'sin offering.' Hence, to show how unimportant and non-essential is the distinction between them, the 'lot' is employed; also, while the one is being slain, the other stands before the 'door of the Tabernacle.' This shows that both are parts of one whole, and it is only from the impossibility of presenting both halves of the truth to be symbolised in one that two are taken. The one which is slain represents the sacrifice for sin. The other represents the effects of that sacrifice. It is never heard of more. 'The Lamb of God taketh away the sins of the world.' 'As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us.'

I. The perfect removal of all sin is thus symbolised.

Notice (1) the vivid consciousness of sin which marked Judaism.

Was it exaggerated or right?

The same consciousness is part of all of us, but how overlaid! how stifled!

That consciousness once awakened has in it these elements—a bitter sense of sin as mine, involving guilt; despair as to whether I can ever overcome it; and fearful thoughts of my relation to God which conscience itself brings.

(2) The futility of all attempts to remove these fears.

False religions have next to nothing to say about forgiveness. Sacrifices and lustrations they have, but no assurance of absolution. Systems of philosophy and morals have nothing to say but that the universe goes crashing on, and if you have broken its laws you must suffer. That is all, or only the poor cheer of 'Well! you have fallen, get up and go on again!' So men often drug themselves into forgetfulness. They turn away from the unwelcome subject, and forget it at the price of all moral earnestness and often of all happiness; a lethargic sleep or a gaiety, as little real as that of the Girondins singing in their prison the night before being led out to the guillotine.

It is only God's authoritative revelation that can ensure the cure, only He can assure us of pardon, and of the removal of all barriers between ourselves and His love. Only His word can ensure, and His power can effect, the removal of the consequences of our sins. Only His word can ensure, and His power effect, the removal of the power of evil on our characters.

(3) Still the question, Can guilt ever be cancelled? often assumes a fearful significance.

Doubtless much seems to say that it cannot be.

(a) The irrevocableness of the past.

(b) The rigid law of consequences in this world.

(c) The indissoluble unity of an individual life and moral nature, confirmed by the experience of failure in all attempts at reformation of self.

(d) The consciousness of disturbed relations with God, and the prophecy of judgment. All this that ancient symbol suggested. The picture of the goat going away, and away, and away, a lessening speck on the horizon, and never heard of more is the divine

symbol of the great fact that there is full, free, everlasting forgiveness, and on God's part, utter forgetfulness. 'Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow.' 'I will remember them no more at all for ever.'

II. The bearing away of sin is indissolubly connected with sacrifice. Two goats were provided, of which one was offered for a sin offering, indicating that sacrifice came first; then the removal of sin was symbolised by the sending away of the second goat. There is an evident reference to this sequence in the words 'without shedding of blood there is no remission.' The two goats represent Christ's work; the one in its essence, the other in its effect.

The one teaches that sacrifice is a necessary condition of pardon. Forgiveness was not given because the offerer confessed his guilt or because 'God was merciful,' but because the goat had been slain as a sin offering. There is deep spiritual truth for us in this symbolism. We do not need to enter on the philosophy of atonement, but simply to rest on the fact—that the only authority on which we can be sure of forgiveness at all indissolubly associates the two things, sacrifice and pardon. We have no reason to believe in forgiveness except from the Bible record and assurance.

Was the Mosaic ritual a divinely appointed thing? If so, its testimony is conclusive. But even if it were only the embodiment of human aspirations and wants, it would be a strong evidence of the necessity of some such thing as forgiveness.

The shallow dream that God's forgiveness can be extended without a sacrifice having been offered does not exalt but detracts from the divine character. It

invariably leads to an emasculated abhorrence of evil, and detracts from the holiness of God, as well as introduces low thoughts of the greatness of forgiveness and of the infinite love of God.

III. The bearing away of sin is associated with man's laying of his sins on the sacrifice appointed by God.

We have seen that the two goats must be regarded as together making one whole. The one which was slain made 'atonement . . . because of the uncleannesses of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions, even all their sins,' but that expiation was not actually effective till Aaron had 'laid his hands on the head of the live goat, and confessed over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, . . . and put them on the head of the live goat, and sent him away into the wilderness.' The sacrifice of the slain goat did not accomplish the pardon or removal of the people's sins, but made it possible that their sins should be pardoned and removed.

Then the method by which that possibility is realised is the laying hands on the scapegoat and confessing the sins upon it. The sins which are actually forgiven, by virtue of the atonement made for all sins, are those which it bears away to the wilderness.

This answers, point for point, to repentance and faith. By these the possibility is turned into an actuality for as many as believe on Christ.

Christ has died for sin. Christ has made atonement by which all sin may be forgiven; whether any shall actually be forgiven depends on something else. It is conceivable that though Christ died, no sin might be pardoned, if no man believed. His blood would not, even then, have been shed in vain, for the purpose of it would have been fully effected in pro-



viding a way by which any and all sin could be forgiven. So that the whole question whether any man's sin is pardoned turns on this, Has he laid his hand on Christ? Faith is only a condition of forgiveness, not a cause, or in itself a power. There was no healing in the mere laying of the hand on the head of the goat.

It was not faith which was the reason for forgiveness, but God's love which had provided the sacrifice.

God's will is not a bare will to pardon, nor a bare will to pardon for Christ's sake, but for Christ's sake to pardon them who believe. 'Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world.' 'Dost thou believe on the Son of God?' 'Through this Man is preached the remission of sins.'

## THE CONSECRATION OF JOY

'And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 34. Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the feast of tabernacles for seven days unto the Lord. 35. On the first day shall be an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein. 36. Seven days ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord; on the eighth day shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord: it is a solemn assembly; and ye shall do no servile work therein. 37. These are the feasts of the Lord, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, to offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord, a burnt offering, and a meat offering, a sacrifice, and drink offerings, every thing upon his day: 38. Beside the sabbaths of the Lord, and beside your gifts, and beside all your vows, and beside all your freewill offerings, which ye give unto the Lord. 39. Also in the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto the Lord seven days: on the first day shall be a sabbath, and on the eighth day shall be a sabbath. 40. And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm-trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; and ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days. 41. And ye shall keep it a feast unto the Lord seven days in the year. It shall be a statute for ever in your generations: ye shall celebrate it in the seventh month. 42. Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths: 43. That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. 44. And Moses declared unto the children of Israel the feasts of the Lord.'—LEV. xxiii. 33-44.

THESE directions for the observance of the great festival at the close of harvest are singularly arranged.

Verses 33-36 give part of the instructions for the Feast, verses 37 and 38 interrupt these with a summary of the contents of the chapter, and verses 39 to the end pick up the broken thread, and finish the regulations for the feast. Naturally, this apparent afterthought has been pointed out as clear evidence of diversity of authorship. But a reasonable explanation may be given on the hypothesis of the unity of the section, by observing that verses 33-36 deal only with the sacrificial side of the feast, as worship proper, and thus come into line with the previous part of the chapter, which is occupied with an enumeration of the annual 'feasts of the Lord' (v. 4). It was natural, therefore, that, when the list had been completed by the sacrificial prescriptions for the last of the series, the close of the catalogue should be marked, in verses 37, 38, and that then the other parts of the observances connected with this feast, which are not sacrificial, nor, properly speaking, worship, should be added. There is no need to invoke the supposition of two authors, and a subsequent stitching together, in order to explain the arrangement. The unity is all the more probable because, otherwise, the first half would give the name of the feast as that of 'tabernacles,' and would not contain a word to account for the name.

We need not, then, include the separating wedge, in verses 37, 38, in our present consideration. The ritual of the feast is broadly divided by it, and we may consider the two portions separately. The first half prescribes the duration of the feast as seven days (the perfect number), with an eighth, which is named, like the first, 'an holy convocation,' on which no work was to be done, but is also called 'a solemn assembly,' or

rather, as the Revised Version reads, in margin, 'a closing festival,' inasmuch as it closed, not only that particular feast, but the whole series for the year. The observances enjoined, then, are the public assembly on the first and eighth days, with cessation from labour, and a daily offering. We learn more about the offering from Numbers **xxix. 12 *et seq.***, which appoints a very peculiar arrangement. On each day there was to be, as on other feast days, one goat for a sin offering; but the number of rams and lambs for the burnt offering was doubled, and, during the seven days of the feast, seventy bullocks were offered, arranged in a singular diminishing scale,—thirteen on the first day, and falling off by one a day till the seventh day, when seven were sacrificed. The eighth day was marked as no part of the feast proper, by the number of sacrifices offered on it, dropping to one bullock, one ram, and seven lambs. No satisfactory account of this regulation has been suggested. It may possibly have meant no more than to mark the first day as the chief, and to let the worshippers down gradually from the extraordinary to the ordinary.

The other half of the regulations deals with the more domestic aspect of the festival. Observe, as significant of the different point of view taken in it, that the first and eighth days are there described, not as 'holy convocations,' but as 'sabbaths,' or, as the Revised Version gives it better, 'a solemn rest.' Observe, also, that these verses connect the feast with the ingathering of the harvest, as does Exodus **xxiii. 16**. It is quite possible that Moses grafted the more commemorative aspect of the feast on an older 'harvest home'; but that is purely conjectural, however confidently affirmed as certain. To tumble down cartloads

of quotations about all sorts of nations that ran up booths and feasted in them at vintage-time does not help us much. The 'joy of harvest' was unquestionably blended with the joy of remembered national deliverance, but that the latter idea was superadded to the former at a later time is, to say the least, not proven. Would it matter very much if it were? Three kinds of trees are specified from which 'the fruit,' that is branches with fruit on them, if the tree bore fruit, were to be taken: palms, 'thick trees,' that is thick foliated, which could give leafy shade, and willows of the brook, which the Rabbis say were used for binding the others together. Verse 40 does not tell what is to be done with these branches, but the later usage was to carry some of them in the hand as well as to use them for booths. The keynote of the whole feast is struck in verse 40: 'Ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God.' The leafy spoils come into view here as tokens of jubilation, which certainly suggests their being borne in the hand; but they were also meant to be used in building the booths in which the whole nation was to live during the seven days, in commemoration of God's having made them 'dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt.' This is all that is enjoined by Moses. Later additions to the ceremonial do not concern us here, however interesting some of these are. The true intention of the feast is best learned from the original simple form.

What, then, was its intention? It was the commemoration of the wilderness life as the ground of rejoicing 'before the Lord.' But we must not forget that, according to Leviticus, it was appointed while the wilderness life was still present, and so was not to be observed then. Was it, then, a dead letter, or had

the appointment a message of joy even to the weary wanderers who lived in the veritable booths, which after generations were to make a feast of mimicking? How firm the confidence of entering the land must have been, which promulgated such a law! It would tend to hearten the fainting courage of the pilgrims. A divinely guaranteed future is as certain as the past, and the wanderers whom He guides may be sure of coming to the settled home. All words which He speaks beforehand concerning that rest and the joyful worship there are pledges that it shall one day be theirs. The present use of the prospective law was to feed faith and hearten hope; and, when Canaan was reached, its use was to feed memory and brighten godly gladness.

The feast of tabernacles was the consecration of joy. Other religions have had their festivals, in which wild tumult and foul orgies have debased the worshippers to the level of their gods. How different the pure gladness of this feast 'before the Lord'! No coarse and sensuous delights of passion could live before the 'pure eyes and perfect witness' of God. In His 'presence' must be purity as well as 'fullness of joy.' If this festival teaches us, on the one hand, that they wofully misapprehend the spirit of godliness who do not find it full of gladness, it teaches us no less, on the other, that they wofully misapprehend the spirit of joy, who look for it anywhere but 'before the Lord.' The ritual of the feast commanded gladness. Joy is a duty to God's children. There were mourners in Israel each year, as the feast came round, who would rather have shrunk into a corner, and let the bright stream of merriment flow past them; but they, too, had to open their heavy hearts, and to feel that, in

spite of their private sorrows, they had a share in the national blessings. No grief should unfit us for feeling thankful joy for the great common gift of 'a common salvation.' The sources of religious joy, open to all Christians, are deeper than the fountains of individual sorrow, deep as life though these sometimes seem.

The wilderness life came into view in the feast as a wandering life of privation and change. The booths reminded of frail and shifting dwellings, and so made the contrast with present settled homes the sweeter. They were built, not of such miserable scrub as grew in the desert, and could scarcely throw shade enough to screen a lizard, but of the well-foliaged branches of trees grown by the rivers of water, and so indicated present abundance. The remembrance of privations and trials past, of which the meaning is understood, and the happy results in some degree possessed, is joy. Prosperous men like to talk of their early struggles and poverty. This feast teaches that such remembrance ought always to trace the better present to God, and that memory of conquered sorrows and trials is wholesome only when it is devout, and that the joy of present ease is bracing, not when it is self-sufficient, but when it is thankful. The past, rightly looked at, will yield for us all materials for a feast of tabernacles; and it is rightly looked at only when it is all seen as God's work, and as tending to settled peace and abundance. Therefore the regulations end with that emphatic seal of all His commands, to impress which on our hearts is the purpose of all His dealings with us as with Israel, 'I am the Lord your God.'

III. We may note our Lord's allusions to the feast. There are probably two, both referring to later additions to the ceremonies. One is in John vii. 37. We

learn from the Talmud that on each of the seven days (and according to one Rabbi on the eighth also) a priest went down to Siloam and drew water in a golden pitcher, which he brought back amid the blare of trumpets to the altar, and poured into a silver basin while the joyous worshippers chanted the 'Great Hallel' (Psa. cxiii.-cxviii.), and thrice waved their palm branches as they sang. We may venture to suppose that this had been done for the last time; that the shout of song had scarcely died away when a stir in the crowd was seen, and a Galilean peasant stood forth, and there, before the priests with their empty vessels, and the hushed multitude, lifted up His voice, so as to be heard by all, and cried, saying: 'If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink.' What increased force is given to the extraordinary self-assertion of such words, if we picture this as the occasion of their utterance! Leviticus gives no pre-eminence to any one day, but John's expression, 'that great day of the feast,' may well have been warranted by later developments.

The other allusion is less certain, though it is probable. It is found in the saying at John viii. 12: 'I am the Light of the world,' etc. The Talmud gives a detailed account of the illuminations accompanying the feast. Four great golden lamps were set up in the court, each tended by four young priests. 'There was not a court in Jerusalem that was not lit up by the lights of the water-drawing.' Bands of grave men with flashing torches danced before the people, while Levites 'accompanied them with harps, psalteries, cymbals, and numberless musical instruments,' and another band of Levites standing on the fifteen steps which led to the women's court, chanted the fifteen

so-called 'songs of degrees,' and yet others marched through the courts blowing their trumpets as they went. It must have been a wild scene, dangerously approximating to the excitement of heathen nocturnal festivals, and our Lord may well have sought to divert the spectators to higher thoughts. But the existence of the allusion is doubtful.

We have one more allusion to the feast, considered as a prophecy of the true rest and joy in the true Canaan. The same John, who has preserved Christ's references, gives one of his own in Revelation vii. 9, when he shows us the great multitude out of every nation 'with palms in their hands.' These are not the Gentile emblems of victory, as they are often taken to be. There are no heathen emblems in the Apocalypse, but all moved within the circle of Jewish types and figures. So we are to think of that crowd of 'happy palmers' as joyously celebrating the true feast of tabernacles in the settled home above, and remembering, with eyes made clear by heaven, the struggles and fleeting sorrows of the wilderness. The emblem sets forth heaven as a festal assembly, as the ingathering of the results of the toils of earth, as settled life after weary pilgrimage, as glad retrospect of the meaning and triumphant possession of the issues of God's patient guidance and wise discipline. Here we dwell in 'the earthly house of this tabernacle'; there, in a 'building of God . . . eternal.' Here we are agitated by change, and wearied by the long road; there, changeless but increasing joy will be ours, and the backward look of thankful wonder will enhance the sweetness of the blessed present, and confirm the calm and sure hope of an ever-growing glory stretching shoreless and bright before us.



## SOJOURNERS WITH GOD

'The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is Mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with Me.'—LEV. xxv. 23.

THE singular institution of the Jubilee year had more than one purpose. As a social and economical arrangement it tended to prevent the extremes of wealth and poverty. Every fiftieth year the land was to revert to its original owners, the lineal descendants of those who had 'come in with the conqueror,' Joshua. Debts were to be remitted, slaves emancipated, and so the mountains of wealth and the valleys of poverty were to be somewhat levelled, and the nation carried back to its original framework of a simple agricultural community of small owners, each 'sitting under his own vine and fig-tree' and, like Naboth, sturdily holding the paternal acres.

As a ceremonial institution it was the completion of the law of the Sabbath. The seventh day proclaimed the need for weekly rest from labour, and as was the sabbath in the week, so was the seventh year among the years—a time of quiet, when the land lay fallow and much of the ordinary labour was suspended. Nor were these all; when seven weeks of years had passed, came the great Jubilee year, charged with the same blessed message of Rest, and doubtless showing dimly to many wearied and tearful eyes some gleams of a better repose beyond.

Besides these purposes, it was appointed to enforce, and to make the whole fabric of the national wealth consciously rest upon, this thought contained in our text. The reason why the land was not to pass out of the hands of the representatives of those to whom God

had originally given it, was that He had not really given it to them at all. It was not theirs to sell—they had only a beneficiary occupation. While they held it, it was still His, and neither they, nor any one to whom they might sell the use of it for a time, were anything more than tenants at will. The land was His, and they were only like a band of wanderers, squatting for a while by permission of the owner, on his estate. Their camp-fires were here to-day, but to-morrow they would be gone. They were ‘strangers and sojourners.’ That may sound sad, but all the sadness goes when we read on—‘with Me.’ They are God’s guests, so though they do not own a foot of soil, they need not fear want.

All this is as true for us. We can have no better New Year’s thoughts than those which were taught by the blast of the silver trumpets that proclaimed liberty to the slaves, and restored to the landless pauper his alienated heritage.

I. Here is the lesson of God’s proprietorship and our stewardship.

‘The land is Mine’ was of course true in a special sense of the territory which God gave by promise and miracle, which was kept by obedience, and lost by rebellion. But it is as really true about our possessions, and that not only because of our transient stay here. It would be as true if we were to live in this world for ever. It will be as true in heaven. Length of time makes no difference in this tenure. Undisturbed possession for ever so long does not constitute ownership here. God is possessor of all, by virtue of His very nature, by His creation and preservation of us and of all things. So that when we talk about ‘mine’ and ‘thine,’ we are only speaking a half truth.

There is a great sovereign 'His' behind both. So then let us take that thought with us for use, as we pass into another year. What lessons does it give?

It should nurture constant thankfulness. To-day looking back over whatever dark, dreary, sunless days, we all have bright ones too. Does any thought of God as the Fountain of all our joys and goods rise in our souls? Have we learned to associate a divine hand and a Father's will with them? Do we congratulate ourselves on our own cleverness, tact, and skill, saying, 'mine hand hath done it,' or do we hug ourselves on our own good fortune, and burn incense to chance and 'circumstances'?—or, sadder still, are we generously grateful to every human friend that helps us, and unthankful only to God—or does the glad thought come, to gild the finest gold of our possessions with new brilliance and worth, and to paint and perfume the whitest lily of our joys with new delightsomeness, 'All things come of Thee'; 'Thou makest us drink of the river of Thy pleasures'? Blessed are they who, by the magic glass of a thankful heart, see all things in God, and God in all things. To them life is tenfold brighter, as a light plunged in oxygen flames more intensely than in common air. The darkest night is filled with light, and the loneliest place blazes with angel faces, and the stoniest pillar is soft, to him who sees everywhere the ladder that knits earth with heaven, and to whom all His blessings are as the messengers that descend by it on errands of mercy, whose long shining ranks lead up the eye and the heart to the loving God from whom they come.

Here too is the ground for constant thankful submission. 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away.' We have no right to murmur, however we may

regret, if the Landowner takes back a bit of the land which He has let us occupy. It was the condition of our occupation that He should be at liberty to do so whenever He saw that it would be best for us. He does not give us our little patches for His advantage, but for ours, nor does He take them away at His own whim, but 'for our profit.' We get more than full value for all the work and capital we have expended, and His only reason for ever disturbing us is that we may be driven to claim a better inheritance in Himself than we can find even in the best of His gifts. So He sometimes gives, that we may be led by our possessions to think lovingly of Him; and He sometimes takes, that we may be led, in the hour of emptiness and loss, to recognise whose hand it was that pulled up the props round which our poor tendrils clung. But the opposite actions have the same purpose, and like the up-and-down stroke of a piston, or the contrary motion of two cogged wheels that play into each other, are meant to impel us in one direction, even to the heart of God who is our home. A landowner stops up a private road one day in a year, in order to assert his right, and to remind the neighbourhood that he could stop it altogether if he liked. So God reminds us by our losses and sorrows, of what we are so apt to forget, and what it is such a joy to us to remember—His possession of them all. Blessed be God! He teaches us in that fashion far seldomer than in the other. Let joy teach us the lesson, and we shall the less need 'the sternest' teacher 'and the best,' even sorrow. Better to learn it by gladness than by tears; better to see it written in 'laughing flowers' than in desolate gardens and killing frost.

So, too, there should be a constant sense of responsi-

bility in the use of all which we have. All is His, and He has given all to us, for a purpose. So, plainly, we are but stewards, or trustees, and are bound to employ everything, not according to our own inclination or notion of what is right, but according to what, in the exercise of our best and most impartial judgment, we believe to be the owner's will. Trusteeship means that we take directions as to the employment of the property from its owner. It means too that we employ it not for our own satisfaction and well-being alone, though that is included, and is a part of His purpose who 'delights in the prosperity of His servants.' Thoughts of others, thoughts of the owner's claims, and of bringing back to Him all that He has given to us, increased by our diligence, must be uppermost in our minds, if we are to live nobly or happily here. 'It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.' And this applies to all we have in mind, body, and estate. A thoughtful expenditure and use of all His gifts, on principles drawn from our knowledge of His will, and for objects not terminating with self, is the duty that corresponds to the great fact of God's ownership of all. If we use His gifts to minister to our own vanity or frivolity, or love of ease, or display; if an 'intolerable deal' of all we have is used for ourselves, and a poor 'ha'porth' for others; if our gifts are grudging; if we possess without sense of responsibility, and enjoy without thankfulness, and lose with murmuring; if our hearts are more set on material prosperity than on love and peace, knowledge and purity, noble lives and a Father God; if higher desires and hopes are dying out as we 'get on' in the world, and religious occupations which used to be pleasant are stale; then for all our outward Christianity the stern old woe

applies, 'Your riches are corrupted, and the rust of them shall be a witness against you,' and we need the shrill note of the trumpet of Jubilee to be blown in our ears, 'The land is Mine.'

II. We have the teaching of the transiency of our stay here.

'Ye are strangers and sojourners'—pilgrims who make a brief halt in a foreign country. The image has in it an allusion to the nomad life of Abraham and his son and grandson, as well as to the desert-wanderings of the people, and suggests the thought, 'You are homeless wanderers, not having where to lay your heads, as truly when you have been settled for generations on your ancestral lands, as when you plodded wearily in the wilderness.' It is a universal truth, ever acknowledged and forgotten, wholesome though sometimes sad to feel, and preached to even frivolous natures by the change in our calendar which a New Year brings.

How vividly this word of our text brings out the contrast between the permanence of the external world and our brief stay in it!

In Israel there would be few vineyards or olive-grounds held by the same man at two, and none at three, successive jubilees. The hoary twisted olives yielded their black berries, say, to Simeon, the son of Joseph, to-day, as they did fifty years ago to Joseph, the son of Reuben, and as they will do fifty years hence to Judas, the son of Simeon. So is it with us all. There is nothing more pathetic than the thought of how generations come and go, and empires rise and fall, while the scene on which they play their brief parts remains the same.

'The mountains look on Marathon,  
And Marathon looks on the sea,'

to-day as they did more than two millenniums ago, only the grass was for a while a little ranker on the plain. Olivet lifts the same outline against the pale morning twilight as when David went up its slope a weeping exile. The pebble that we kick out of our path had thousands of years of existence ere we were born, and may lie there unaltered to all appearance for centuries after we are dead. 'One generation cometh and another goeth, but the earth abideth for ever.'

And how much more lasting our possessions are than their possessors! Where are the strong hands that clutched the rude weapons that lie now quietly ticketed in our museums? How dim and dark the bright brave eyes that once flashed through the bars of these helmets, hanging just a little rusted, over the tombs in Westminster Abbey! Other men will live in our houses, read our books, own our mills, use our furniture, preach in our pulpits, sit in our pews: we are but lodgers in this abiding nature, 'like a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night,' and to-morrow morning vacates his rooms for a new arrival, and goes away unregretted and is forgotten in an hour.

The constant change and progression of life are enforced, too, in this metaphor.

The old threadbare emblem of a journey which is implied in the text suggests how, moment by moment, we hurry on and how everything is slipping past us, as fields and towns do to a traveller in a train. Only our journey is smooth and noiseless, like the old-fashioned canal-boat travelling, where, if you shut your eyes, you could not tell that you were moving. We glide on and never know it, and so gradually and silently is the scene 'changed by still degrees,' that it is only now and then that men have any vivid consciousness that the 'fashion

of this world is' ever 'in the act of passing,' like the canvas of a panorama ever winding and unwinding on its twin rollers with slow, equable motion. It needs an effort of attention and will to discern the movement, and it is worth while to make the effort, for that clear and poignant sense of the constant flux and mutation of all things around us, and of the ebbing away of our own lives, is fundamental to all elevation of thought, to all nobleness of deed, to all worthy conception of duty and of joy. Everything that is, stands poised, like Fortune, on a rolling ball. The solid earth is a movable sphere, for ever spinning on its axis and rushing on its path among the stars. Ever some star is sinking in mist, or dipping below the horizon; ever new constellations are climbing to the zenith. A long, patient discipline is needed to keep fresh in our hearts the sense of this transiency. Let us set ourselves consciously to deepen our convictions of it, and amidst all the illusions of these solid-seeming shows of things, keep firm hold of the assurance that they are but fleeting shadows that sweep across the solemn mountain's side, and that only God and the doing of His will lasts. So shall our life pierce down with its seeking roots to the abiding ground of all Being, and, looking to the 'things that are eternal,' we shall be able to make what is but for a moment contribute to the everlasting ennobling of our character and enrichment of our life yonder.

Surely these words, too, tell of the true home.

'Ye are strangers'—because your native land is elsewhere. It is not merely the physical facts of death and change that make us strangers here, but the direction of our desires, and the true affinities of our nature. If by these we belong to heaven and God, then here we



shall feel that we have not where to lay our heads, and shall 'dwell in tabernacles' because 'we look for the city.'

What a contrast between the perishable tents of the wilderness and the rock-built mansions of that city! And how short this phase of being must look when seen from above! You remember how long a year, a week, seemed to you when a child—what do the first ten years of your life look to you now? What must the earthly life of Abel, the first who died, look to him even now, when he contrasts its short twenty or thirty years with the thousands since? and, after thousands and thousands more, how it will dwindle! So to us, if we reach that safe shore, and look back upon the sea that brought us thither, as it stretches to the horizon, miles of billows once so terrible will seem shrunken to a line of white foam.

Cherish, then, constant consciousness of that solemn eternity, and let your eyes be ever directed to it, like a man who sees some great flush of light on the horizon, and is ever turning from his work to look. Use the transient as preparation for the eternal, the fleeting days as those which determine the undying 'Day' and its character. Keep your cares and interests in the present rigidly limited to necessary things. Why should travellers burden themselves? The less luggage, the easier marching. The accommodation and equipment in the desert do not matter much. The wise man will say, 'Oh, it will do. I shall soon be home.' 'Ye are strangers and sojourners.'

III. We have here also the teaching of trust.

Some of us think that such thoughts as the preceding are sad. Why should they be so? They need not be. Our text adds a little word which takes all the sadness out

of them. 'With Me'; that gives the true notion of our earthly life. We are strangers indeed, passing through a country which is not ours, but whilst we are sojourners, we are 'sojourners' with the king of the land. In the antique hospitable times, the chief of the tribe would take the travellers to his own tent, and charge himself with their safety and comfort. So we are God's guests on our travels. He will take care of us. The visitor has no need to trouble himself about the housekeeping, he may safely leave that with the master of the house. If the king has taken us in charge, we may be quite sure that no harm will come to us in his country. So for ourselves and for those we love, and for all the wide interests of church and world, there are peace and strength in the thought that we are the guests of God here, 'strangers and sojourners with *Him*.' Will He invite us to His table and let us hunger? Will He call us to be His guests, and then, like some traitorous Arab sheikh, break the laws of hospitality and harm His too-confiding guests? Impossible for evermore. So we are safe, and our bread shall be given us, for we are sojourners with God.

True, we are strangers, and in our constant movement we lose many of the companions of our march, and the track of the caravan may be traced by the graves on either side. But, since we are 'with Him,' we have companionship even when most solitary, and even in a strange land shall not be lonely. Seek then to cultivate as a joy and strength that consciousness that the Lord of all the land is ever with you. Whoever goes, He abides. Whatever rushes past us like a phantasmagoria, He passes not. Whatever and whoever change, He changes never. Where thou goest, He will go. He will be 'thy shield at thy right hand,' and

thy 'keeper from all evil.' So, looking forward to the unknown days of another New Year, we may be of good cheer.

So will it be while we live; and if this year we should die—well, the King of this land, where we are strangers, is the King of the other land beyond the sea, where we are at home. So we shall only be the nearer to Him for the change. Death the separator shall but unite us to the King, whose presence indeed fills this subject-province of His empire with all its good, but who dwells in more resplendent 'beauty,' and is felt in greater nearness in the other 'land that is very far off.' Whether here or there, we may have God with us, if we will. With Him for our Host and companion, let us peacefully go on our road, while the life of strangers and sojourners shall last. It will bring us to the fatherland where we shall be at home with the King, and find in Him our 'sure dwelling, and quiet resting-place, and peaceful habitation for ever.'

## GOD'S SLAVES

'For they are My servants, which I brought forth out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as bondmen.'—LEV. xxv. 42.

THIS is the basis of the Mosaic legislation as to slavery. It did not suppress but regulated that accursed system. Certainly Hebrew slavery was a very different thing from that of other nations. In the first place, no Jew was to be a slave. To that broad principle there were exceptions, such as the case of the man who voluntarily gave himself up to his creditor. But even he was not to be treated as a slave, but as a 'hired servant,' and at the jubilee was to be set free. There

were also other regulations of various kinds in other circumstances on which we do not need to dwell. The slaves of alien blood were owned and used, but under great mitigations and restrictions.

Of course we have here an instance of the incompleteness of the Mosaic law,—or rather we may more truly say of its completeness, regard being had to the state of the world at the time. All social change hangs together. Institutions cannot be altered at a blow, without altering the stage of civilisation, of which they are the expression. ‘Raw haste’ is ‘half-sister to delay.’ What is good and necessary for one era is out of place in another. So God works slowly, and lets bad things die out, by changing the atmosphere in which they flourish.

All servitude to men was an infraction of God’s rights over Israel. God was the Israelites’ ‘Master’; they were His ‘slaves.’ He was so, because He had ‘broken the bands of their yoke, and set them free.’ There is, then, here—

- I. The ground of God’s rights. ‘I brought you forth.’
- II. Our servitude because of our redemption. ‘Ye are My servants.’
- III. Our consequent freedom from all other masters. ‘Ye shall not be sold as bondmen.’

### THE KINSMAN REDEEMER

‘After that he is sold he may be redeemed again; one of his brethren may redeem him.’—LEV. XXV. 48.

THERE are several of the institutions and precepts of the Mosaic legislation which, though not prophetic, nor typical, have yet remarkable correspondences

with lofty Christian truth. They may be used as symbols, if only we remember that we are diverting them from their original purpose.

How singularly these words lend themselves to the statement of the very central truths of Christianity—a slavery which is not necessarily perpetual and a redemption effected by a kinsman!

That institution of the 'Goel' is of a very remarkable kind, and throws great light on Christian verities. I wish, in dealing with it, to guard against any idea that it was meant to be prophetic or typical.

#### I. The kinsman redeemer under the old law.

The strength of the family tie in the Israelitish polity was great. The family was the unit—hence there were certain duties devolving on the nearest male relative. These, so far as we are at present concerned, were three.

(a) The redemption of a slave. The Mosaic legislation about slavery was very remarkable. It did not nominally prohibit it, but it fenced it round and modified it, so as to make it another thing.

Israelites were allowed to hold Gentile slaves, but under careful restrictions. Israelites were allowed to sell themselves as slaves. If the sale was to Israelites, the slavery was ended in six years or at the jubilee, whichever period came first—unless the slave had his ear bored to the doorpost to intimate his contentment in service (Exod. xxi. 5, 6). This is not slavery in our sense of the word, but only a six years' engagement. If sold to a heathen in Israel, then the Goel had to redeem him; and the reason for this was that all Israelites belonged to God.

(b) The redemption of an inheritance.

This was the task of the kinsman-goel. The land

belonged to the tribe. Pauperism was thus kept off. There could be no 'submerged tenth.' The theocratic reason was, 'the land shall not be sold at all for ever, for it is Mine!'

(c) The avenging of murder. Blood feuds were thus checked, though not abolished. The remarkable institution of 'cities of refuge' gave opportunity for deliberate investigation into each case. If wilful murder was proved, the murderer was given up to the Goel for retribution; if death had been by misadventure, the slayer was kept in the city of refuge till the high-priest's decease.

This is the germ of the figure of the Redeemer-Kinsman in later Scripture. Notice how higher ideas began to gather round the office. The prophets felt that in some way God was their 'Goel.' In Isaiah the application of the name to Him is frequent and, we might almost say, habitual. So in Psalm xlix. 7, 'None can be Goel to his brother'; verse 15, 'God will be Goel to my soul from the power of the grave.'

Job xix. 25, 'I know that my Goel liveth. . . .'

## II. Our Kinsman-Redeemer.

The New Testament metaphor of 'Redemption' or buying back with a ransom is distinctly drawn from the Hebrew Goel's office.

Christ is the Kinsman. The brotherhood of Christ with us was voluntarily assumed, and was for the purpose of redeeming His brethren.

He is the Kinsman-Redeemer from slavery,—a slavery which is voluntary. The soul is self-delivered to evil and sin; but blessed be God! this slavery is terminable. The kinship of Christ was needful for our redemption. 'It behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren.' He thus gave His life a 'ransom'

for many. Note the objective value of His atonement, and its subjective power as setting us free.

He is the Kinsman-Redeemer of our inheritance. God is the inheritance here. The manhood of Jesus brings God back to us for our—(1) Knowledge; (2) Love; (3) Possession. Heaven is our inheritance hereafter. His manhood secures it for us. 'I go to prepare a place for you.' 'An inheritance incorruptible.' 'The redemption of the purchased possession.'

The Kinsman-Avenger of blood. It is only in a modified sense that we can transfer this part of the Goel's office to Jesus. The old Kinsman-Avenger of blood avenged it by shedding the shedder's blood in retribution. But that was not the kind of vindication (for Goel means also Vindicator) for which Job looked when he used the expression. Resurrection to the vision of God was to come to him 'at the last,' by the standing of his Goel on the earth, and that was to be the true avenging of his death, and his vindication. The great murderer Death is to die, and his victims are to be wrested from him, and their death be proved to be the means of their fuller life. 'Precious shall their blood be in His sight,' and when their slayer is slain they will live for ever, partakers of their Kinsman-Redeemer's glory, because they had been partakers of His death, and His blood had been precious in their sight. Let us cling to our Kinsman-Redeemer in all our life that He may give us freedom and an inheritance among His brethren, and, closing our eyes in death, we may commend our spirits to the 'Angel that redeemed us from all evil,' and be sure that He will 'redeem' our 'souls from the power of the grave.'

## THE OLD STORE AND THE NEW

'Ye shall eat old store, and bring forth the old because of the new.'

LEV. xxvi. 10.

THIS is one of the blessings promised to obedience. No doubt it, like the other elements of that 'prosperity' which 'is the blessing of the Old Testament,' presupposes a supernatural order of things, in which material well-being was connected with moral good far more closely and certainly than we see to be the case. But the spirit and heart of the promise remain, however the form of it may have passed away. It is a picturesque way of saying that the harvest shall be more than enough for the people's wants. All through the winter, and the spring, and the ripening summer, their granaries shall yield supplies. There will be no season of scarcity such as often occurs in countries whose communications are imperfect, just before harvest, when the last year's crop is exhausted, and it is hard to get anything to live on till this year's is ready. But when the new wheat comes in they will have still much of the old, and will have to 'bring it forth' to empty their barns, to make room for the fresh supplies which the blessing of God has sent before they were needed. The same idea of superabundant yield from the fields is given under another form in a previous verse of this chapter (ver. 5): 'Your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time, and ye shall eat your bread to the full': which reminds one of the striking prophecy of Amos: 'Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the



treader of grapes him that soweth seed.' So rapid the growth, and so large the fruitfulness, that the gatherer shall follow close on the heels of the sower, and will not have accomplished his task before it is again time to sow. The prophet clearly has in his mind the old promise of the law, and applies it to higher matters, even to the fields white to harvest, where 'he that soweth and he that reapeth shall rejoice together.' In the same way we may take these words, and gather from them better promises and larger thoughts than they originally carried.

There is in them a promise as to the fullness of the divine gifts, which has a far wider reach and nobler application than to the harvests and granaries of old Palestine.

We may take the words in that aspect, first, as containing God's pledge that these outward gifts shall come in unbroken continuity. And have they not so come to us all, for all these long years? Has there ever been a gap left yawning? has there ever been a break in the chain of mercies and supplies? has it not rather been that 'one post ran to meet another,' that before one of the messengers had unladed all his budget, another's arrival has antiquated and put aside his store? True, we are often brought very low; there may not be much in the barn but sweepings, and a few stray grains scattered over the floor. We may have but a handful of meal in the barrel, and be ready to dress it 'that we may eat it, and die.' But it never really comes to that. The new ever comes before the old is all eaten up; or if it be delayed even beyond that time, it comes before the hunger reaches inanition. It may be good that we should have to trust Him, even when the storehouse is empty; it may be good for us to know

something of want, but that discipline comes seldom, and is never carried very far. For the most part He anticipates wants by gifts, and His good gifts overlap each other in our outward lives as slates on a roof, or scales on a fish.

We wonder at the smooth working of the machinery for feeding a great city; and how, day by day, the provisions come at the right time, and are parted out among hundreds of thousands of homes. But we seldom think of the punctual love, the perfect knowledge, the profound wisdom which cares for us all, and is always in time with its gifts. It was that quality of punctuality extended over a whole universe which seemed so wonderful to the Psalmist: 'The eyes of all wait upon Thee, and Thou givest them their meat in due season.' God's machinery for distribution is perfect, and its very perfection, with the constancy of the resulting blessings, robs Him of His praise, and hinders our gratitude. By assiduity He loses admiration.

'Things grown common lose their dear delight.' 'If in His gifts and benefits He were more sparing and close-handed,' said Luther, 'we should learn to be thankful.' But let us learn it by the continuity of our joys, that we may not need to be taught it by their interruption; and let us still all tremulous anticipation of possible failure or certain loss by the happy confidence which we have a right to cherish, that His mercies will meet our needs, continuous as they are, and be strung so close together on the poor thread of our lives that no gap will be discernible in the jewelled circle.

May we not apply that same thought of the unbroken continuity of God's gifts to the higher region of our spiritual experience? His supplies of wisdom, love, joy, peace, power, to our souls are always enough

and more than enough for our wants. If ever men complain of languishing vitality in their religious emotions, or of a stinted supply of food for their truest self, it is their own fault, not His. He means that there should be no parentheses of famine in our Christian life. It is not His doing if times of torpor alternate with seasons of quick energy and joyful fullness of life. So far as He is concerned the flow is uninterrupted, and if it come to us in jets and spurts as from an intermittent well, it is because our own fault has put some obstacle to choke the channel and dam out His Spirit from our spirits. We cannot too firmly hold, or too profoundly feel, that an unbroken continuity of supplies of His grace—unbroken and bright as a sunbeam reaching in one golden shaft all the way from the sun to the earth—is His purpose concerning us. Here, in this highest region, the thought of our text is most absolutely true; for He who gives is ever pouring forth His own self for us to take, and there is no limit to our reception but our capacity and our desire; nor any reason for a moment's break in our possession of love, righteousness, peace, but our withdrawal of our souls from beneath the Niagara of His grace. As long as we keep our poor vessels below that constant downpour they will be full. It is all our own blame if they are empty. Why should Christian people have these dismal times of deadness, these parentheses of paralysis? as if their growth must be like that of a tree with its alternations of winter sleep and summer waking? In regard to outward blessings we are, as it were, put upon rations, and 'that He gives' us we 'gather.' There He sometimes does, in love and wisdom, put us on very short allowance, and even now and then causes 'the fields to yield no meat.' But never

is it so in the higher region. There He puts the key of the storehouse into our own hands, and we may take as much as we will, and have as much as we take. There the bread of God is given for evermore, and He wills that in uninterrupted abundance 'the meek shall eat and be satisfied.'

The source is full to overflowing, and there are no limits to the supply. The only limit is our capacity, which again is largely determined by our desire. So after all His gifts there is more yet unreceived to possess. After all His Self-revelation there is more yet unspoken to declare. Great as is the goodness which He has 'wrought before the sons of men for them that trust in Him,' there are far greater treasures of goodness 'laid up' in the deep mines of God 'for them that fear Him.' Bars of uncoined treasure and ingots of massy gold lie in His storehouses, to be put into circulation as soon as we need, and can use, them. Hence we have the right to look for an endless increase in our possession of God; and from the consideration of an Infinite Spirit that imparts Himself, and of finite but indefinitely expansible spirits that receive, the certainty arises of an endless life for us of growing glory; a heaven of ceaseless advance, where in constant alternation desire shall widen capacity, and capacity increase fruition, and fruition lead in, not satiety, but quickened appetite and deeper longing.

But we may also see in this text the prescription of a duty as well as the announcement of a promise. There is direction here as to our manner of receiving God's gifts, as well as large assurance as to His manner of bestowing them. It is His to substitute the new for the old. It is ours gladly to accept the exchange, a task not always easy or pleasant.

No doubt there is a natural love of change deep in us all, but that is held in check by its opposite, and all poetry and human life itself are full of the sadness born of mutation. Our Lord laid bare a deep tendency, when He said, 'No man having tasted old wine, straightway desireth new; because he saith the old is better.' We cling to what is familiar, in the very furniture of our houses; and yet we are ever being forced to accept what is strange and new, and, like some fresh article in a room, is out of harmony with the well-worn things that we have seen standing in their corners for years. It takes some time for the raw look to wear off, and for us to 'get used to it,' as we say. So is it, though often for deeper reasons, in far more important things. A man, for instance, has been engaged in some kind of business for years, and at last God shows him, by clear indications, that he must turn to something else. How slow he is to see it, how reluctant to do it! How he cleaves to the 'old store'! How he shrinks from clearing out the barn, to bring in the new! Or a household has been going on for many days unbroken, and at last a time comes when some of its members have to pass out into new circumstances; a son to push his way in the world, a daughter to brighten another fireside. It is hard for the parents to enter fully into the high hopes of their children, and to accept the new condition, without many vain longings for the old days that can never come back any more. So, all through our lives, wisdom and faith say, 'Bring forth the old because of the new.' Accept cheerfully the law of constant change under which God's love has set us. Do not let the pleasant bonds of habit tie down your hearts so tightly to the familiar possessions that you shrink from the introduction of fresh elements. Be sure that

the new comes from the same loving hand which sent the old in its season, and that change is meant to be progress. Do not confine yourselves within any mill-horse round of associations and occupations. Front the vicissitudes of life, not merely with brave patience, but with happy confidence, for they all come from Him whose love is older than your oldest blessings, and whose mercies, new every morning, express themselves afresh through every change. Welcome the new, treasure the old, and in both see the purpose of that loving Father who, Himself unchanged, changeth all things, and

'. . . fulfils Himself in many ways,  
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.'

In higher matters than these our text may give us counsel as to our duty. 'God hath more light yet to break forth from His holy word.' We are bound to welcome new truth, so soon as to our apprehensions it has made good its title, and not to refuse it lodgment in our minds because it needs the displacement of their old contents. In the regions of our knowledge and of our Christian life, most chiefly, are we under solemn obligations to 'bring forth the old store because of the new'; if we would not be unfaithful to God's great educational process that goes on through all our lives. It is often difficult to adjust the relations of our last lesson with our previous possessions. There is always a temptation to make too much of a new truth, and to fancy that it will produce more change in our whole mental furniture than it really will do. No man is less likely to come to the knowledge of the truth than he who is always deep in love with some new thought, 'the Cynthia of the minute,' and ever ready to barter

'old lamps for new ones.' But all these things admitted, still it remains true that we are here to learn, that our education is to go on all our days, and that here on earth it can only be carried out by our parting with the old store, which may have become musty by long lying in the granaries, to make room for the new, just gathered in the ripened field. The great central truths of God in Christ are to be kept for ever; but we shall come to grasp them in their fullness only by joyfully welcoming every fresh access of clearer light which falls upon them; and gladly laying aside our inadequate thoughts of God's permanent revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ, to house and garner in heart and spirit the fuller knowledge which it may please Him to impart.

So the law for life is thankful enjoyment of the old store, and openness of mind and freedom of heart which permit its unreluctant surrender when newer harvests ripen. And the highest form of the promise of our text will be when we pass into another world, and its rich abundance is poured out into our laps. Blessed are they who can willingly put away the familiar blessings of earth, and stretch out, willingly emptied, expectant hands to meet the 'new store' of Heaven!

## EMANCIPATED SLAVES

'I am the Lord your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, that ye should not be their bondmen; and I have broken the bands of your yoke, and made you go upright.'—LEV. xxvi. 13.

THE history of Israel is a parable and a prophecy as well as a history.

The great central word of the New Testament has

been drawn from it, viz. 'redemption,' *i.e.* a buying out of bondage.

The Hebrew slaves in Egypt were 'delivered.' The deliverance made them a nation. God acquired them for Himself, and they became His servants.

The great truths of the gospel are all there.

Henceforth the fact of their deliverance became the basis of all His appeals to them; the ground of His law; the reason for their obedience. In the previous context it has shaped the institution of slavery. Here it is the foundation of a general exhortation to obedience. The emphatic picture of the men stooping beneath the yoke, and then straightening themselves up, erect, illustrates the joyful freedom which Christ gives. That freedom is our subject.

I. Jesus gives freedom from the slavery of sin.

Freedom consists in power to follow unhindered the law of our being. So sin is slavery because it is contrary to that law.

When Jesus promised freedom through the truth, the Jews indignantly spurned the offer with the proud boast, which the presence of a Roman garrison in Jerusalem should have made to stick in their throats: 'We were never in bondage to any man.' A like hardy shutting of eyes to plain facts characterises the attitude of multitudes to the Christian view of man's condition. Jesus answered the Jews by the deep saying: 'He that committeth sin is the servant of sin.' A man fancies himself showing off his freedom by throwing off the restraints of morality or law, and by 'doing as he likes,' but he is really showing his servitude. Self-will looks like liberty, but it is serfdom. The libertine is a slave. That slavery under sin takes two forms. The man who sins is a slave to the power of sin. Will and



conscience are meant to guide and impel us, and we never sin without first coercing or silencing them and subjecting them to the upstart tyranny of desires and senses which should obey and not command. The 'beggars' are on horseback, and the 'princes' walking. There is a servile revolt, and we know what horrors accompany that.

But that slavery under sin is shown also by the terrible force with which any sin, if once committed, appeals to the doer to repeat it. It is not only in regard to sensual sins that the awful insistence of habit grips the doer, and makes it the rarest thing that evil once done is done only once.

But he who sins is also a slave to the guilt of sin. True, that sense of guilt is for the most part and in most men dormant, but the snake is but hibernating, and often wakes and stings at most unexpected moments. 'The deceitfulness of sin' lies to the sinner, so that for the most part he 'wipes his mouth, saying I have done no harm,' but some chance incident may at any time, and certainly something will at some time, dissipate the illusion, as a stray sunbeam might scatter a wisp of mist and show startled eyes the grim fact that had always been there. And even while not consciously felt, guilt hampers the soul's insight into divine realities, clips its wings so that it cannot soar, paralyses its efforts after noble aims, and inclines it to ignoble grovelling as far away from thoughts of God and goodness as may be.

Christ makes the man bound and tied by the cords of his sins lift himself up and stand erect. By His death He brings forgiveness which removes guilt and the consciousness of it. By His inbreathed life He gives a new nature akin to His own, and brings into force a

new motive, even transforming love, which is stronger than the death with which sin has cursed its doers. 'The law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.'

II. Jesus gives freedom from a slavish relation to God.

Apart from Him, God, if recognised at all, is for the most part thought of as 'austere, reaping where He did not sow,' and His commandments as grievous. Men may sullenly recognise that they cannot resist, but they do not submit. They may obey in act, but there is no obedience in their wills, nor any cheerfulness in their hearts. The elder brother in the parable could say, 'Neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment,' but his service had been joyless, and he never remembered having received gifts that made him 'merry with his friends.'

But from all such slavish, and therefore worthless, obedience, and all such reluctant, and therefore unreal, submission, Jesus liberates those who believe on Him and abide in His word. He declares God as our loving Father, and through Him we have authority to become sons of God. He 'sends forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts,' and that makes us to be no more slaves but sons. Sullen obedience becomes glad choice, and it is the inmost desire, and the deepest delight, of the loving child to do always the things that please the loving Father. 'I ought' and 'I will' coalesce, and so there is no slavery, but perfect freedom, in recognising and bowing to the great 'I must' which sweetly rules the life.

III. Christ gives deliverance from servility to men.

We need not touch on the historical connection, plain as that is, between modern conceptions of

individual freedom and the influence of Christ's teaching. Modern democracy is rooted in Christ, though it is often unaware of its genesis, and blindly attacks the force to which it owes its existence.

Because all men are redeemed by Christ, because by that redemption all stand in the same relation to Him, because all have equal access to Him, and are taught and guided by His Spirit, because 'we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ,' therefore class prerogatives and subject-classes fade away, and there is 'neither bond nor free,' but 'all are one in Christ Jesus.'

But there are other ways in which men tyrannise over men and in which Christ's redemption sets us free.

There is the undue authority of favourite teachers and examples.

There is the tyranny of public opinion.

There is undue regard to human approbation.

There is the sway of priestcraft.

How does Christianity deliver from these? It makes Christ's law our unconditional duty. It makes His approbation our highest joy. It gives legitimate scope to the instinct of loyalty, submission, and imitation, and of subjection to authority. It reduces to insignificance men's judgment, and all their loud voices to a babble of nothings. 'With me it is a very small matter to be judged of man's judgment.' It brings the soul into direct communion with God, and sweeps away all intermediaries.

'Not for that we have dominion over your faith but are helpers of your joy; for by faith ye stand.'

So personal independence and individuality of character are the result of Christianity. 'I have made you go upright.'

IV. Christ gives us freedom from the power of circumstances.

Most men are made by these. We need not here enter on questions of the influence of their environment on all men's development.

But Christ gives us—

(a) A great aim for our lives high above these.

(b) A foothold in Him outside of them. We are not the slaves of our circumstances, but their masters.

(c) The power to utilise them.

So Christians are 'free' in all senses of the word.

The great Act of Emancipation has been passed for us all. Only Christ has rule over us, and we have our perfect freedom in His service. We have been sitting in the prison-house, and He has come and declared 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me to proclaim liberty to the captives.'

# THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

## THE WARFARE OF CHRISTIAN SERVICE

'All that enter in to perform the service, to do the work in the tabernacle.'

NUM. iv. 23.

THESE words occur in the series of regulations as to the functions of the Levites in the Tabernacle worship. The words 'to perform the service' are, as the margin tells us, literally, to 'war the warfare.' Although it may be difficult to say why such very prosaic and homely work as carrying the materials of the Tabernacle and the sacrificial vessels was designated by such a term, the underlying suggestion is what I desire to fix upon now—viz., that work for God, of whatever kind it be, which Christian people are bound to do, and which is mainly service for men for God's sake, will never be rightly done until we understand that it is a *warfare*, as well as a work.

The phrase on which I am commenting occurs again and again in the regulations as to the Levitical service, and is applied, not only as in my text to those who were told off to bear the burdens on the march, but also to the whole body of Levites, who did the inferior services in connection with the ritual worship. They were not, as it would appear, sacrificing priests, but they belonged to the same tribe as these, and they had sacred functions to discharge. So we come to this principle, that Christian service is to be looked at as warfare.

Now, that is a principle which ought to be applied to

all Christians. For there is no such thing as designating a portion of Christ's Church to service which others have not to perform. The distinction of 'priest' and 'layman' existed in the Old Testament; it does not exist under the New Covenant, and there is no obligation upon any one Christian man to devote himself for Christ's sake to Christ's service and man's help (which is Christ's service), that does not lie equally upon all Christian people. The function is the same for all; the methods of discharging it may be widely different. Within the limits of the priestly tribe there may still be those whose office it is to carry the vessels, and those whose office it is to act more especially as ministering priests; but they are all 'of the tribe of Levi.' We, if we are Christian people at all, are all bound to do this work of 'the tabernacle,' and war this warfare.

It is important that we Christian people should elevate our thoughts of our duties in the world to the height of this great metaphor. The metaphor of the Christian life as being a 'warfare' is familiar enough, but that is not exactly the point which I wish to dwell upon now. When we speak about 'fighting the good fight of faith,' we generally mean our wrestle and struggle with our own evils and with the things that hinder us from developing a Christlike character, and 'growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.' But it is another sort of warfare about which I am now speaking, the warfare which every Christian man has to wage who flings himself into the work of diminishing the world's miseries and sins, and tries to make people better, and happier because they are better. That is a fight, and will always be so, if it is rightly done.

I. Think of the foes.

Speaking generally, society is constituted upon a non-Christian basis. We talk about 'Christian' nations. There is not one on the face of the earth. There is not a nation whose institutions and maxims and politics and the practices of its individual members are ruled and moulded predominantly by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. So every man that has come into personal touch with that Lord, and has felt that His commandments are the supreme authority in his own individual life, when he goes out into society, comes full tilt against a whole host of things that are in pronounced antagonism, or in real though unacknowledged contradiction, to the principles by which a Christian has to live for himself, and to commend to his brethren. So we have to fight. There are two things to be done—the imparting of good which will increase the sum of the world's happiness, and the destruction of evil, which will subtract some of the world's sorrows. The latter is always a conflict, for there are arrayed in defence of the evil vested interests, and the influence of habit, and the lowered vitality and sensitiveness of conscience which has come from breathing the polluted atmosphere which evil has vitiated. So that if we set ourselves, in humble, quiet, out-and-out dependence on Jesus Christ and submission to His will, to lead other people to submit to His will, there is nothing in the world more certain than that we shall find against us, starting up, as it were, out of the mist and taking form suddenly, a whole host of enemies. So we Christian men, as individuals, as members of a community and able to bring some influence to bear upon the conscience of society, have to fight against popular social evils, and to war for righteousness' sake.

There is another foe. There is nothing that men

dislike more than being lifted up into a clearer atmosphere and made to see truths which they do not see or care for. When we first become Christians we are all hot to go and teach and preach; and we fancy that we have only to stand up, with a Bible in our hand, and read two or three texts, and our fellows will grasp them as gladly as we have done. But soon we find out that it is not so easy to draw men to Christ as we thought it would be. We have to fight against gravitation and unwillingness, when we would lift a poor brother into the liberty and the light that we are in. We have to struggle with the men that we are trying to help. We have to war, in order to bring 'the peace of God which passes understanding' into their hearts.

But the worst of all our foes, in doing Christian service, is our own miserable selves, with our laziness, and our vanity, and our wondering what A, B, and C will think about us, and the mingling of impure motives with nobler ones, and our being angry with people because they are so insensible, not so much to Christ's love as to our words and pleadings. Unless we can purge all that devil's leaven out of ourselves, we have little chance of working 'the work of the tabernacle,' or warring the warfare of God. Ah! brethren, to do anything for this world of unbelief and sin, of which we ourselves are part, is a struggle. And I know of no work that needs more continual putting a firm heel upon self, in all its subtle manifestations, than the various forms of Christian service. Not only we preachers, but Sunday-school teachers, mothers in their nurseries, teaching their children, and all of us, if we are trying to do anything for men, for Christ's sake, must feel, if we are honest with ourselves and about our work, that the first condition of success in it is to



fight down self, and that only then, being emptied of ourselves, are we ready to be filled with the Spirit, by which we are made mighty to pull down the strongholds of sin.

## II. The weapons of this warfare.

There are two great passages in the New Testament, both of which deal with the Christian life under this metaphor of warfare. One of these is the detailed description of the Christian armour in the Epistle to the Ephesians. There we have described the equipment for that phase of the fight of the Christian life which has to do mainly with the perfecting of the individual character. But somewhat different is the armour which is to be worn, when the Christian man goes out into the world to labour and to wage war there for Jesus Christ. We may turn, then, rather to the other of the two passages in question for the descriptions of the equipment, armour, and weapons of the Christian in his warfare for the spread of truth and goodness in the world. The passage to which I refer is in 2 Cor. vi. What are the weapons that Paul specifies in that place? I venture to alter their order, because he seems to have put them down just as they came into his mind, and we can put some kind of logical sequence into them. 'By the Word of God'—that is the first one. 'By the Holy Ghost,' which is otherwise given as 'by the power of God,' is the next. Get your minds and hearts filled with the truth of the Gospel, and dwell in fellowship with God, baptized with His Holy Spirit; and then you will be clothed 'as with a vesture down to your heels' with the power of God. These are the divine side, the weapons given us from above—'the Word of God' which is 'the sword of the Spirit,' and the indwelling Holy Ghost manifesting Himself in power. Then follow a series of

human qualities which, though they are 'the fruit of the Spirit,' are yet not produced in us without our own co-operation. We have to forge and sharpen these weapons, though the fire in which they are forged is from above, and the metal of which they are made is given from heaven, like meteoric iron. These are 'kindness, long-suffering, love unfeigned.' We have to dismiss from our minds the ordinary characteristics of warfare in thinking of that which Christians are to wage. Like the old Knights Templars, we must carry a sword which has a cross for its hilt, and must be clad in gentleness, and long-suffering, and unfeigned love. 'The wrath of men worketh not the righteousness of God.' You cannot bully people into Christianity, you cannot scold them into goodness. There must be sweetness in order to attract, and he imperfectly echoes the music of the voice that came from 'the lips into which grace was poured,' whose words are harsh and rough, and who preaches the Gospel as if he were thundering damnation into people's ears.

Brethren, whatever be our warfare against sin, we must never lose our tempers. Harsh words break no bones indeed, but neither do they break hearts. A character like Jesus Christ—that is the victorious weapon. Let a man go and live in the world with these weapons that I have been naming, the truth of God in his heart, the Holy Spirit in his spirit, the power that comes therefrom animating his deadness and strengthening his weakness, and himself an emblem and an embodiment of the redeeming love of Christ—and though he spoke no word he would be sure to preach Christ; and though he struck no blow he would be a formidable antagonist to the hosts of evil, and the icebergs of sin and godlessness would run down

into water before his silent and omnipotent shining. These are the weapons.

III. Note the temper, or disposition, of the Christian warrior-servant.

Courage goes without saying. If a man expects to be beaten, and to do nothing by his Christian witness but clear his conscience, he deserves nothing else than what he will get—viz. that his expectation will be fulfilled and he *will* do nothing else *but* clear his conscience, and that imperfectly. That is why so many preachers and Sunday-school teachers never see any conversions in their congregation or classes—because they do not expect any; because they go to their work without the enthusiastic boldness which would give power to their utterances.

I suppose concentration, too, goes without saying. When a man is on the battlefield with the swords whirling about his head, and the bayonets an inch from his breast, he does not go dreaming of scenes a hundred miles off, or think anything else than the one thing, how to keep a whole skin and wound an enemy. If Christian men will do their work in the dawdling, half-interested, and half-indifferent way in which so many of us promenade through our Christian service as if it was a review and not a fight, they are not likely to bring back many trophies of victory. You must put your whole selves into the battle. I said we must subdue ourselves ere we begin to fight. That is no contradiction to what I am saying now, for, as we all know, there is a distinction between the two selves in us—the self-centred self, which is to be crucified, and the God-centred self, which is to be nourished. You must put your whole selves into the battle.

There must, too, be discipline. One difference be-

tween a mob and an army is that the mob has as many wills as there are heads in it, and the army has only one will, that of the commander. He says to one man 'Go!' and he goes, and gets shot; and to another one 'Come!' and he comes; and to a third one 'Do this!' and, no matter what it is, straightway he goes and does it. So if we are soldiers we have to take orders from headquarters, and to be sure that we pay no attention to any other commands. Suppose a man is set at a certain post by his captain, and a corporal comes and says, 'You go and do this other thing; never mind your post, I will look after that,' to obey that is mutiny. If Jesus Christ tells you to do anything, and any others say 'Do not do it just yet!' neglect them, and obey Him. If your own heart says, 'Stop a little while and try something other and easier before you tackle that task,' be sure of the Captain's voice, and then, whatever happens, obey, and obey at once. Warfare is a diabolical thing, but there is a divine beauty in one aspect of it—

Their's not to make reply,  
 Their's not to reason why,  
 Their's but to do—

even if it mean 'to die.' Thus let us wage warfare.

#### IV. The Relieving Guard.

This metaphor of warfare is used in the Book of Job, in a passage where our English Version does not show it. So I venture to substitute the right translation for the one in the Authorised Version, 'All the days of my warfare will I wait till my change comes.' The guard will be relieved some day, and the private that has been tramping up and down in the dark or the snow, perhaps within rifle's length of the enemy, will shoulder his gun and go into the comfortable guard-

house, and hang up his knapsack, and fling off his dirty boots, and sit down by the fire, and make himself comfortable. There is a 'heavenly manner of relieving guard.' Soon it will be the end of the sentry's time, and then, as one of those that had done a good day's work, and a long one, said with a sigh of relief, 'I have fought a good fight.' Henceforth the helmet is put off, which is 'the hope of salvation,' and the crown is put on, which is salvation in its fullness. 'All the days of my warfare will I wait'—till my Captain relieves the guard.

### THE GUIDING PILLAR

'So it was always: the cloud covered [the tabernacle] by day, and the appearance of fire by night.'—NUM. ix. 16.

THE children of Israel in the wilderness, surrounded by miracle, had nothing which we do not possess. They had some things in an inferior form; their sustenance came by manna, ours comes by God's blessing on our daily work, which is better. Their guidance came by this supernatural pillar; ours comes by the reality of which that pillar was nothing but a picture. And so, instead of fancying that men thus led were in advance of us, we should learn that these, the supernatural manifestations, visible and palpable, of God's presence and guidance were the beggarly elements: 'God having provided some better thing for us that they without us should not be made perfect.'

With this explanation of the relation between the miracle and symbol of the Old, and the reality and standing miracle of the New, Covenants, let us look at

the eternal truths, which are set before us in a transitory form, in this cloud by day and fiery pillar by night.

I. Note, first, the double form of the guiding pillar.

The fire was the centre, the cloud was wrapped around it. The former was the symbol, making visible to a generation who had to be taught through their senses, the inaccessible holiness and flashing brightness and purity of the divine nature; the latter tempered and veiled the too great brightness for feeble eyes.

The same double element is found in all God's manifestations of Himself to men. In every form of revelation are present both the heart and core of light, which no eye can look upon, and the merciful veil which, because it veils, unveils; because it hides, reveals; makes visible because it conceals; and shows God because it is 'the hiding of His power.' So, through all the history of His dealings with men, there has ever been what is called in Scripture language the 'face,' or the 'name of God'; the aspect of the divine nature on which the eye can look; and manifested through it, there has always been the depth and inaccessible abyss of that Infinite Being. We have to be thankful that in the cloud is the fire, and that round the fire is the cloud. For only so can our eyes behold and our hands grasp the else invisible and remote central Sun of the universe. God hides to make better known the glories of His character. His revelation is the flashing of the uncreated and intolerable light of His infinite Being through the encircling clouds of human conceptions and words, or of deeds which each show forth, in forms fitted to our apprehension, some fragment of His lustre. After all revelation, He remains unrevealed. After ages of showing forth His glory, He is still 'the King invisible, whom no man hath seen

at any time nor can see.' The revelation which He makes of Himself is 'truth and is no lie.' The recognition of the presence in it of both the fire and the cloud does not cast any doubt on the reality of our imperfect knowledge, or of the authentic participation in the nature of the central light, of the sparkles of it which reach us. We know with a real knowledge what we know of Him. What He shows us is Himself, though not His whole self.

This double aspect of all possible revelation of God, which was symbolised in comparatively gross external form in the pillar that led Israel on its march, and lay stretched out and quiescent, a guarding covering above the Tabernacle when the weary march was still, recurs all through the history of Old Testament revelation by type and prophecy and ceremony, in which the encompassing cloud was comparatively dense, and the light which pierced it relatively faint. It reappears in both elements in Christ, but combined in new proportions, so as that 'the veil, that is to say, His flesh,' is thinned to transparency and all aglow with the indwelling lustre of manifest Deity. So a light, set in some fair alabaster vase, shines through its translucent walls, bringing out every delicate tint and meandering vein of colour, while itself diffused and softened by the enwrapping medium which it beautifies by passing through its purity. Both are made visible and attractive to dull eyes by the conjunction. 'He that hath seen Christ hath seen the Father,' and he that hath seen the Father in Christ hath seen the man Christ, as none see Him who are blind to the incarnate deity which illuminates the manhood in which it dwells.

But we have to note also the varying appearance of the pillar according to need. There was a double

change in the pillar according to the hour, and according as the congregation was on the march or encamped. By day it was a cloud, by night it glowed in the darkness. On the march it moved before them, an upright pillar, as gathered together for energetic movement; when the camp rested it 'returned to the many thousands of Israel' and lay quietly stretched above the Tabernacle like one of the long-drawn, motionless clouds above the setting summer sun, glowing through all its substance with unflashing radiance reflected from unseen light, and 'on all the glory' (shrined in the Holy Place beneath) was 'a defence.'

Both these changes of aspect symbolise for us the reality of the Protean capacity of change according to our ever-varying needs, which for our blessing we may find in that ever-changing, unchanging, divine Presence which will be our companion, if we will.

It was not only by a natural process that, as daylight declined, what had seemed but a column of smoke in the fervid desert sunlight, brightened into a column of fire, blazing amid the clear stars. But we may well believe in an actual admeasurement of the degree of light, correspondent to the darkness and to the need for certitude and cheering sense of God's protection, which the defenceless camp would feel as they lay down to rest.

When the deceitful brightness of earth glistens and dazzles around us, our vision of Him may be 'a cloudy screen to temper the deceitful ray'; and when 'there stoops on our path, in storm and shade, the frequent night,' as earth grows darker, and life becomes greyer and more sombre, and verges to its eventide, the pillar blazes brighter before the weeping eye, and draws



nearer to the lonely heart. We have a God who manifests Himself in the pillar of cloud by day, and in flaming fire by night.

## II. Note the guidance of the pillar.

When it lifts the camp marches; when it glides down and lies motionless the march is stopped, and the tents are pitched. The main point which is dwelt upon in this description of the God-guided pilgrimage of the wandering people is the absolute uncertainty in which they were kept as to the duration of their encampment, and as to the time and circumstances of their march. Sometimes the cloud tarried upon the Tabernacle many days; sometimes for a night only; sometimes it lifted in the night. 'Whether it was by day or by night that the cloud was taken up, they journeyed. Or whether it were two days, or a month, or a year that the cloud tarried upon the Tabernacle, remaining thereon, the children of Israel abode in their tents, and journeyed not; but when it was taken up they journeyed.' So never, from moment to moment, did they know when the moving cloud might settle, or the resting cloud might soar. Therefore, absolute uncertainty as to the next stage was visibly represented before them by that hovering guide which determined everything, and concerning whose next movement they knew absolutely nothing.

Is not that all true about us? We have no guiding cloud like this. So much the better. Have we not a more real guide? God guides us by circumstances, God guides us by His word, God guides us by His Spirit, speaking through our common-sense and in our understandings, and, most of all, God guides us by that dear Son of His, in whom is the fire and round whom is the cloud. And perhaps we may even suppose that

our Lord implies some allusion to this very symbol in His own great words, 'I am the Light of the world. He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.' For the conception of 'following' the light seems to make it plain that our Lord's image is not that of the sun in the heavens, or any such supernal light, but that of some light which comes near enough to a man to move before him, and behind which he can march. So, I think, that Christ Himself laid His hand upon this ancient symbol, and in these great words said in effect, 'I am that which it only shadowed and foretold.' At all events, whether in them He was pointing to our text or no, we must feel that He is the reality which was expressed by this outward symbol. And no man who can say, 'Jesus Christ is the Captain of my salvation, and after His pattern I march; at the pointing of His guiding finger I move; and in His footsteps, He being my helper, I try to tread,' need feel or fancy that any possible pillar, floating before the dullest eye, was a better, surer, or diviner guide than he possesses. They whom Christ guides want none other for leader, pattern, counsellor, companion, reward. This Christ is our Christ 'for ever and ever, He will be our guide even unto death' and beyond it. The pillar that we follow, which will glow with the ruddy flame of love in the darkest hours of life—blessed be His name!—will glide in front of us through the 'valley of the shadow of death,' brightest then when the murky midnight is blackest. Nor will the pillar which guides us cease to blaze, as did the guide of the desert march, when Jordan has been crossed. It will still move before us on paths of continuous and ever-increasing approach to infinite perfection. They who here follow Christ

afar off and with faltering steps shall there 'follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.'

In like manner, the same absolute uncertainty which was intended to keep the Israelites (though it failed often to do so) in the attitude of constant dependence, is the condition in which we all have to live, though we mask it from ourselves. That we do not know what lies before us is a commonplace. The same long tracts of monotonous continuance in the same place and doing the same duties befall us that befell these men. Years pass, and the pillar spreads itself out, a defence above the unmoving sanctuary. And then, all in a flash, when we are least thinking of change, it gathers itself together, is a pillar again, shoots upwards, and moves forwards; and it is for us to go after it. And so our lives are shuttlecocked between uniform sameness which may become mechanical monotony, and agitation by change which may make us lose our hold of fixed principles and calm faith, unless we recognise that the continuance and the change are alike the will of the guiding God, whose will is signified by the stationary or moving pillar.

III. That leads me to the last thing that I would note—viz. the docile following of the Guide.

In the context, the writer does not seem to be able to get away from the thought that whatever the pillar indicated, immediate prompt obedience followed. He says so over and over and over again. 'As long as the cloud abode they rested, and when the cloud tarried long they journeyed not'; and 'when the cloud was a few days on the Tabernacle they abode'; and 'according to the commandment they journeyed'; and 'when the cloud abode until the morning they journeyed'; and 'whether it were two days, or a month, or a year

that the cloud tarried they journeyed not, but abode in their tents.' So, after he has reiterated the thing half a dozen times or more, he finishes by putting it all again in one verse, as the last impression which he would leave from the whole narrative—'at the commandment of the Lord they rested in their tents, and at the commandment of the Lord they journeyed.' Obedience was prompt; whensoever and for whatsoever the signal was given, the men were ready. In the night, after they had had their tents pitched for a long period, when only the watchers' eyes were open, the pillar lifts, and in an instant the alarm is given, and all the camp is in a bustle. That is what we have to set before us as the type of our lives. We are to be as ready for every indication of God's will as they were. The peace and blessedness of our lives largely depend on our being eager to obey, and therefore quick to perceive, the slightest sign of motion in the resting, or of rest in the moving, pillar which regulates our march and our encamping.

What do we need in order to cultivate and keep such a disposition? We need perpetual watchfulness lest the pillar should lift unnoticed. When Nelson was second in command at Copenhagen, the admiral in command of the fleet hoisted the signal for recall, and Nelson put his telescope to his blind eye and said, 'I do not see it.' That is very like what we are tempted to do. When the signal for unpleasant duties that we would gladly get out of is hoisted, we are very apt to put the telescope to the blind eye, and pretend to ourselves that we do not see the fluttering flags. We need still more to keep our wills in absolute suspense, if His will has not declared itself. Do not let us be in a hurry to run before God. When the

Israelites were crossing the Jordan, they were told to leave a great space between themselves and the guiding ark, that they might know how to go, because they had 'not passed that way heretofore.' Impatient hurrying at God's heels is apt to lead us astray. Let Him get well in front, that you may be quite sure which way He desires you to go, before you go. And if you are not sure which way He desires you to go, be sure that He does not at that moment desire you to go anywhere.

We need to hold the present with a slack hand, so as to be ready to fold our tents and take to the road, if God will. We must not reckon on continuance, nor strike our roots so deep that it needs a hurricane to remove us. To those who set their gaze on Christ, no present, from which He wishes them to remove, can be so good for them as the new conditions into which He would have them pass. It is hard to leave the spot, though it be in the desert, where we have so long encamped that it has come to feel like home. We may look with regret on the circle of black ashes on the sand where our little fire glinted cheerily, and our feet may ache, and our hearts ache more, as we begin our tramp once again, but we must set ourselves to meet the God-appointed change cheerfully, in the confidence that nothing will be left behind which it is not good to lose, nor anything met which does not bring a blessing, however its first aspect may be harsh or sad.

We need, too, to cultivate the habit of prompt obedience. It is usually reluctance which puts the drag on. Slow obedience is often the germ of incipient disobedience. In matters of prudence and of intellect, second thoughts are better than first, and third

thoughts, which often come back to first ones, better than second; but in matters of duty, first thoughts are generally best. They are the instinctive response of conscience to the voice of God, while second thoughts are too often the objections of disinclination, or sloth, or cowardice. It is easiest to do our duty when we are at first sure of it. It then comes with an impelling power which carries us over obstacles as on the crest of a wave, while hesitation and delay leave us stranded in shoal water. If we would follow the pillar, we must follow it at once.

A heart that waits and watches for God's direction, that uses common-sense as well as faith to unravel small and great perplexities, and is willing to sit loose to the present, however pleasant, in order that it may not miss the indications which say, 'Arise, this is not your rest,' fulfils the conditions on which, if we keep them, we may be sure that He will guide us by the right way, and bring us at last to 'the city of habitation.'

### HOBAB

'And Moses said unto Hobab . . . Come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.'—NUM. x. 29.

THERE is some doubt with regard to the identity of this Hobab. Probably he was a man of about the same age as Moses, his brother-in-law, and a son of Jethro, a wily Kenite, a Bedouin Arab. Moses begs him to join himself to his motley company, and to be to him in the wilderness 'instead of eyes.' What did Moses want a man for, when he had the cloud? What do we want common-sense for, when we have God's

Spirit? What do we want experience and counsel for, when we have divine guidance promised to us? The two things work in together. The cloud led the march, but it was very well to have a man that knew all about the oases and the wells, the situation of which was known only to the desert-born tribes, and who could teach the helpless slaves from Goshen the secrets of camp life. So Moses pressed Hobab to change his position, to break with his past, and to launch himself into an altogether new and untried sort of life.

And what does he plead with him as the reason? 'We will do thee good, for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.' Probably Hobab looked rather shy at the security, for I suppose he was no worshipper of Jehovah, and he said, 'No; I had rather go home to my own people and my own kindred and my father's house where I fit in, and keep to my own ways, and have something a little more definite to lay hold of than your promise, or the promise of your Jehovah that lies behind it. These are not solid, and I am going back to my tribe.' But Moses pressed and he at last consented, and the following verses suggest that the arrangement was made satisfactorily, and that the journeyings began prosperously. In the Book of Judges we find traces of the presence of Hobab's descendants as incorporated among the people of Israel. One of them came to be somebody, the Jael who struck the tent-peg through the temples of the sleeping Sisera, for she is called 'the wife of Heber the *Kenite*.' Probably, then, in some sense Hobab must have become a worshipper of Jehovah, and have cast in his lot with his brother-in-law and his people. I do not set Hobab up as a shining example. We do not know much about his religion. But it seems to me that this little glimpse

into a long-forgotten and unimportant life may teach us two or three things about the venture of faith, the life of faith, and the reward of faith.

I. The venture of faith.

I have already said that Hobab had nothing in the world to trust to except Moses' word, and Moses' report of God's Word. 'We will do you good; God has said that He will do good to us, and you shall have your share in it.' It was a grave thing, and, in many circumstances, would have been a supremely foolish thing, credulous to the verge of insanity, to risk all upon the mere promise of one in Moses' position, who had so little in his own power with which to fulfil the promise; and who referred him to an unseen divinity, somewhere or other; and so drew bills upon heaven and futurity, and did not feel himself at all bound to pay them when they fell due, unless God should give him the cash to do it with. But Hobab took the plunge, he ventured all upon these two promises—Moses' word, and God's word that underlay it.

Now that is just what we have to do. For, after all talking about reasons for belief, and evidences of religion, and all the rest of it, it all comes to this at last—will you risk everything on Jesus Christ's bare word? There are plenty of reasons for doing so, but what I wish to bring out is this, that the living heart and root of true Christianity is neither more nor less than the absolute and utter reliance upon nothing else but Christ, and therefore on His word. He did not even condescend to give reasons for that reliance, for His most solemn assurance was just this, 'Verily, verily, I say unto you.' That is as much as to say, 'If you do not see in Me, without any more argument, reason enough for believing Me, you do not see Me at all.'



Christ did not argue—He asserted, and in default of all other proof, if I might venture to say so, He put His own personality into the scales and said, ‘There, that will outweigh everything.’ So no wonder that ‘they were astonished at His doctrine,’—not so much at the substance of it as at the tone of it, ‘for He taught them *with authority.*’

But what right had He to teach them with authority? What right has He to present Himself there in front of us and proclaim, ‘I say unto you, and there is an end of it’? The heart and essence of Christian faith is doing, in a far sublimer fashion, precisely what this wild Arab did, when he uprooted himself from the conditions in which his life had grown up, and flung himself into an unknown future, on bare trust in a bare word. Jesus Christ asks us to do the same by Him. Whether His word comes to us revealing, or commanding, or promising, it is absolute, and, for His true followers, ends all controversy, all hesitation, all reluctance. When He commands it is ours to obey and live. And when He promises it is for us to twine all the tendrils of our expectations round that faithful word, and by faith to make ‘the anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast.’ The venture of faith takes a *word* for the most solid thing in the universe, and the Incarnate Word of God for the basis of all our hope, the authority for all our conduct, ‘the Master-light of all our seeing.’

II. Hobab suggests to us, secondly—

The sort of life that follows the venture of faith.

The hindrances to his joining Moses were plainly put by himself. He said in effect, ‘I will not come; I will depart to mine own land and to my kindred. Why should I attach myself to a horde of strangers, and go

wandering about the desert for the rest of my life, looking out for encampments for them, when I can return to where I have been all my days; and be surrounded by the familiar atmosphere of friends and relatives?' But he bethought himself that there was a nobler life to live than that, and because he was stirred by the impulse of reliance on Moses and his promise, and perhaps by some germ of reliance on Moses' God, he finally said, 'The die is cast. I choose my side. I will break with the past. I turn my back on kindred and home. Here I draw a broad line across the page, and begin over again in an altogether new kind of life. I identify myself with these wanderers; sharing their fortunes, hoping to share their prosperity, and taking their God for my God.' He had perhaps not been a nomad before, for there still are permanent settlements as well as nomad encampments in Arabia, as there were in those days, and he and his relatives, from the few facts that we know of them, seem to have had a fixed home, with a very narrow zone of wandering round it. So Hobab, an old man probably, if he was anything like the age of his connection by marriage, Moses, who was eighty at this time, makes up his mind to begin a new career.

Now that is what we have to do. If we have faith in Christ and His promise, we shall not say, 'I am going back to my kindred and to my home.' We shall be prepared to accept the conditions of a wanderer's life. We shall recognise and feel, far more than we ever have done, that we are indeed 'pilgrims and sojourners' here. Dear Christian friends, we have no business to call ourselves Christ's men, unless the very characteristic of our lives is that we are drawn ever forward by the prospect of future

good, and unless that future is a great deal more solid and more operative upon us, and tells more on our lives, than this intrusive, solid-seeming present that thrusts itself between us and our true home. That is a sure saying. The Christian obligation to live a life of detachment, even while diligent in duty, is not to be brushed aside as pulpit rhetoric and exaggeration, but it is the plainest teaching of the New Testament. I wish it was a little more exemplified in the daily life of the people who call themselves Christians.

If I am not living for the unseen and the future, what right have I to say that I am Christ's at all? If the shadows are more than the substance to me; if this condensed vapour and fog that we call reality has not been to our apprehension thinned away into the unsubstantial mist that it is, what have the principles of Christianity done for us, and what worth is Christ's word to us? If I believe Him, the world is—I do not say, as the sentimental poet put it, 'but a fleeting show, for man's illusion given';—but as Paul puts it, a glass which may either reveal or obscure the realities beyond; and according as we look at, or look through, 'the things seen and temporal,' do we see, or miss, 'the things unseen and eternal.' So, then, the life of faith has for its essential characteristic—because it is a life of reliance on Christ's bare word—that future good is consciously its supreme aim. That will detach us, as it did Hobab, from home and kindred, and make us feel that we are 'pilgrims and sojourners.'

III. Lastly, our story suggests to us—

The rewards of faith.

'Come with us,' says Moses; 'we are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you. Come thou with us, and we will do thee what goodness

the Lord shall do unto us.' He went, and neither he nor Moses ever saw the land, or at least never set their feet on it. Moses saw it from Pisgah, but probably Hobab did not even get so much as that.

So he had all his tramping through the wilderness, and all his work, for nothing, had he? Had he not better have gone back to Midian, and made use of the present reality, than followed a will-of-the-wisp that led him into a bog, if he got none of the good that he set out expecting to get? Then, did he make a mistake? Would he have been a wiser man if he had stuck to his first refusal? Surely not. It seems to me that the very fact of this great promise being given to this old—dare I call Hobab a 'saint'?—to this old saint, and never being fulfilled at all in this world, compels us to believe that there was some gleam of hope, and of certainty, of a future life, even in these earliest days of dim and partial revelation.

To me it is very illuminative, and very beautiful, that the dying Jacob bursts in his song into a sudden exclamation, 'I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord!' It is as if he had felt that all his life long he had been looking for what had never come, and that it could not be that God was going to let him go down to the grave and never grasp the good that he had been waiting for all his days. We may apply substantially the same thoughts to Hobab, and to all his like, and may turn them to our own use, and argue that the imperfections of the consequences of our faith here on earth are themselves evidences of a future, where all that Christ has said shall be more than fulfilled, and no man will be able to say, 'Thou didst send me out, deluding me with promises which have all gone to water and have failed.'

Hobab dying there in the desert had made the right choice, and if we will trust ourselves to Christ and His faithful word, and, trusting to Him, will feel that we are detached from the present and that it is but as the shadow of a cloud, whatever there may be wanting in the results of our faith here on earth, there will be nothing wanting in its results at the last. Hobab did not regret his venture, and no man ever ventures his faith on Christ and is disappointed. 'He that believeth shall not be confounded.'

### THE HALLOWING OF WORK AND OF REST

'And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said, Rise up, Lord, and let Thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate Thee flee before Thee. 36. And when it rested, he said, Return, O Lord, unto the many thousands of Israel.'—NUM. x. 35, 36.

THE picture suggested by this text is a very striking and vivid one. We see the bustle of the morning's breaking up of the encampment of Israel. The pillar of cloud, which had lain diffused and motionless over the Tabernacle, gathers itself together into an upright shaft, and moves, a dark blot against the glittering blue sky, the sunshine masking its central fire, to the front of the encampment. Then the priests take up the ark, the symbol of the divine Presence, and fall into place behind the guiding pillar. Then come the stir of the ordering of the ranks, and a moment's pause, during which the leader lifts his voice—'Rise, Lord, and let Thine enemies be scattered, and let them that hate Thee flee before Thee.' Then, with braced resolve and confident hearts, the tribes set forward on the day's march.

Long after those desert days a psalmist laid hold of the old prayer and offered it, as not antiquated yet by the thousand years that had intervened. 'Let God arise, and let His enemies be scattered,' prayed one of the later psalmists; 'let them that hate Him flee before Him.' We, too, in circumstances so different, may take up the immortal though ancient words, on which no dimming rust of antiquity has encrusted itself, and may, at the beginnings and the endings of all our efforts and of each of our days, and at the beginning and ending of life itself, offer this old prayer—the prayer which asked for a divine presence in the incipiency of our efforts, and the prayer which asked for a divine presence in the completion of our work and in the rest that remaineth.

I. So, then, if we put these two petitions together, I think we shall see in them first, a pattern of that realisation of, and aspiration after, the divine Presence, which ought to fill all our lives.

'Rise, Lord, let Thine enemies be scattered.'

But was not that moving pillar the token that God had risen? And was not the psalmist who reiterated Moses' prayer asking for what had been done before he asked it? Was not the ark the symbol of the divine Presence, and was not its movement after the pillar a pledge to the whole host of Israel that the petition which they were offering, through their leader's lips, was granted ere it was offered? Yes. And yet the present God would not manifest His Presence except in response to the desire of His servants; and just because the ark was the symbol, and that moving column was the guarantee of God's being with the host as their defence, therefore there rose up with confidence this prayer, 'Rise, Lord, and let Thine enemies be scattered.'

That twofold attitude, the realisation of, and therefore the aspiration after, the divine gifts, which are given before they are desired, but are not appropriated and brought into operation in our lives unless they are desired, is precisely the paradox of the Christian life. Having, we long for, and longing, we have, and because we possess God we pray, 'Oh! that we might possess Thee.' The more we long, the more we receive. But unless He gave Himself in anticipation of our longing, there would be neither longing nor reception. Only on condition of our desiring to have Him does He flow into our lives, victorious and strength-giving, and the more we experience that omnipotent might and calming, guiding nearness, the more assuredly we shall long for it.

Let us then, dear brethren, blend these two things together, for indeed they are inseparable one from the other, and there can be no real experience in any depth of the one of them without the other. Blessed be God! there need be no long interval of waiting between sowing the seed of supplication and reaping the harvest of fruition. That process of growth and reaping goes on with instantaneous rapidity. 'Before they call I will answer,' for pillar and ark were there ere Moses opened his lips; and 'while they are yet speaking I will hear,' for, in response to the cry, the host moved triumphantly, guarded through the wilderness. So it may be, and ought to be, with each of us.

In like manner, coupling these two petitions together, and taking them as unitedly covering the whole field of life in their great antitheses of work and rest, effort and accomplishment, beginning and ending, morning and evening, we may say that here is an example, to be appropriated in our own lives, of that continuous longing

and realisation which will encircle all life as with a golden ring, and make every part of it uniform and blessed. To begin, continue, and end with God is the secret of joyful beginning, of patient continuance, and of triumphant ending. There is no reason in heaven, though there are hosts of excuses on earth, why there should not be, in the case of each of us, an absolutely continuous and uninterrupted sense of being with God. O brethren! that is a stage of Christian experience high above the one on which most of us stand. But that is our fault, and not the necessity of our condition. Let us lay this to heart, that it is possible to have the pillar always guiding our march, and possible to have it stretching, calm and motionless, over all our hours of rest.

II. Now, if, turning from the lessons to be drawn from these two petitions, taken in conjunction, we look at them separately, we may say that we have here an example of the spirit in which we should set ourselves, day by day, and at each new epoch and beginning, be it greater or smaller, to every task.

There are truths that underlie that first prayer, 'Rise up, Lord, and let Thine enemies be scattered,' which are of perennial validity, and apply to us as truly as to these warriors of God in the wilderness long centuries ago. The first of them is that the divine Presence is the source of all energy, and of successful endeavour after, and accomplishment of, any duty. The second of them is that that presence is, as I have been saying, granted, in its operative power, only on condition of its being sought. And the third of them is that I have a right to identify my enemies with God's only on condition that I have made His cause mine. When Moses prayed, 'Let Thine enemies be



scattered,' he meant by these the hostile nomad tribes that might ring Israel round, and come down like a sandstorm upon them at any moment. What right had he to suppose that the people whose lances and swords threatened the motley host that he was leading through the wilderness were God's enemies? Only this right, that his host had consented to be God's soldiers, and that they having thus made His enemies theirs, He, on His part, was sure to make their enemies His. We are often tempted to identify our foes with God's, without having taken the preliminary step of having so yielded ourselves to be His servants and instruments for carrying forward His will, as that our own wills have become a vanishing quantity, or rather have been ennobled and greatened in proportion as they have been moulded in submission to His. We must take God's cause for ours, in all the various aspects of that phrase. And that means, first of all, that we make our own perfecting into the likeness of Jesus Christ the main aim of our own lives and efforts. It means, further, the putting ourselves bravely and manfully on the side of right and truth and justice, in all their forms. Above all, it means that we give ourselves to be God's instruments in carrying on His great purposes for the salvation of the world through Jesus Christ. If we do these things, whatever obstacles may arise in our paths, we may be sure that these are God's antagonists, because they are antagonists to God's work in and by us.

Only in so far as they are such, can you pray, 'Let them flee before Thee!' Many of the things that we call our enemies come to us disguised, and are mistaken by our superficial sight, and we do not know that they are friends. 'All things work together for good to

them that love God.' And, when we desire His Presence, the hindrances to doing His will—which are the only real enemies that we have to fight—will melt away before His power, 'as wax melteth' before the ardours of the fire; and, for the rest, the distresses, the difficulties, the sorrows, and all the other things that we so often think are our foes, we shall find out to have been our friends. Make God's cause yours, and He will make your cause His.

That applies to the great things of life, and to the little things. I begin my day's work some morning, perhaps wearied, perhaps annoyed with a multiplicity of trifles which seem too small to bring great principles to bear upon them. But do you not think there would be a strange change wrought in the petty annoyances of every day, and in the small trifles of which all our lives, of whatever texture they are, must largely be composed, if we began each day and each task with that old prayer, 'Rise, Lord, and let Thine enemies be scattered'? Do you not think there would come a quiet into our hearts, and a victorious peace to which we are too much strangers? If we carried the assurance that there is One that fights for us, into the trifles as well as into the sore struggles of our lives, we should have peace and victory. Most of us will not have many large occasions of trial and conflict in our career; and, if God's fighting for us is not available in regard to the small annoyances of home and daily life, I know not for what it is available. 'Many littles make a mickle,' and there are more deaths in skirmishes than in the field of a pitched battle. More Christian people lose their hold of God, their sense of His presence, and are beaten accordingly, by reason of the little enemies that come down on them, like a cloud of gnats in a

summer evening, than are defeated by the shock of a great assault or a great temptation, which calls out their strength, and sends them to their knees to ask for help from God.

So we may learn from this prayer the spirit of expectation of victory which is not presumption, and of consecration, which alone will enable us to pass through life victorious. 'Be of good cheer,' said the Master, as if in answer to this prayer in its Christian form—'I have overcome the world.' We turn to the helmed and sworded Figure that stands mysteriously beside us whilst we are all unaware of His coming, and the swift question that Joshua put rises to our lips, 'Art Thou for us or for our adversaries?' The reply comes, 'Nay! but as Captain of the Lord's host am I come up.' That is Christ's answer to the prayer, 'Rise, Lord, let Thine enemies be scattered.'

III. Lastly, we have here a pattern of the temper for hours of repose.

'When the ark rested, he said, "Return, O Lord, unto the many thousands of Israel."' As I said at the beginning of these remarks, the pillar of cloud seems to have taken two forms, braced together upright when it moved, diffused and stretched as a shelter and a covering over the host of Israel when it and they were at rest. In like manner, that divine Presence is Protean in its forms, and takes all shapes, according to the moment's necessities of the Christian trusting heart. When we are to brace ourselves for the march it condenses itself into an upright and moving guide. When we lay ourselves down with relaxed muscles for repose, it softly expands itself and 'covers our head' in the hours of rest, 'as in the day of battle.'

Ah! brother, we have more need of God in times of

repose than in times of effort. It is harder to realise His Presence in the brief hours of relaxation than even in the many hours of strenuous toil. Every one who goes for a holiday knows that. You have only to look at the sort of amusements that most people fly to when they have not anything to do, to see that there is quite as much, if not more, peril to communion of soul with God in times when the whole nature is somewhat relaxed, and the strings are loosened, like those of a violin screwed down a turn or two of the peg, than there is in times of work.

So let us take special care of our hours of repose, and be quite sure that they are so spent as that we can ask when the day's work is done, and we have come to slippared ease, in preparation for nightly rest, 'Return, O Lord, unto Thy waiting servant.' Work without God unfits for rest with Him. Rest without God unfits for work for Him.

We may take these two petitions as tests of the allowableness of any occupation, or of any relaxation. Dare I ask Him to come with me into that field of work? If I dare not, it is no place for me. Dare I ask Him to come with me into this other chamber of rest? If I dare not, I had better never cross its threshold. Take these two prayers, and where you cannot pray them, do not risk yourself.

But the highest form of the contrast between the two waits still to be realised. For life as a whole is a fight, and beyond it there is the 'rest that remaineth,' where there will be not merely God's 'return unto the thousands of Israel,' but the realisation of His fuller presence, and of deeper rest, which shall be wondrously associated with more intense work, though in that work there will be no conflict. The two petitions will

flow together then, for whilst we labour we shall rest; and whilst we rest we shall labour, according to the great sayings, 'they rest from their labours,' and yet 'they rest not day nor night.'

## MOSES DESPONDENT

'I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me.'

NUM. xi. 14.

DETAIL the circumstances.

The leader speaks the truth in his despondency. He is pressed with the feeling of his incapacity for his work. We may take his words here as teaching us what men need in him who is to be their guide, and how impossible it is to find what they need in mere men.

I. What men need in their guide.

These Israelites were wandering in the wilderness; they were without natural supplies for their daily necessities; they had a long hard journey before them, an unknown road, at the terminus of which was a land where they should rest. We have precisely the same necessities as those which Moses despairingly said that they had.

Like them, we wander hungry, and need a Leader who can satisfy our desires and evermore give us bread for our souls even more than for our bodies. We need One to whom we can 'weep,' as the Israelites did to Moses, and not weep in vain. We need One who can do for us what Moses felt that the Israelites needed, and that he could not give them, when he almost indignantly put to God the despairing question, 'Can I carry them in my bosom as a nursing father beareth the sucking child?' Our weakness, our ignorance, our heart-

hunger, cry out for One who can 'bear all this people alone,' who in his single Self has resources of strength, wisdom, and sufficiency to meet not only the wants of one soul but those of the world. For He who can satisfy the poorest single soul must be able to satisfy all men.

II. The impossibility of finding this in men.

Moses' experience here is that of all leaders and great men. He is overwhelmed with the work; feels his own utter impotence; has himself to be strengthened; loathes his work; longs for release from it. See how he confesses

His human dependence.

His incapacity to do and be what is needed.

His impatience with the people.

His longing to be rid of it all.

That is a true picture of the experience of the best of men—a true picture of the limitations of the noblest leaders.

But it is not only the leaders who confess their inadequacy, but the followers feel it, for even the most enthusiastic of them come sooner or later to find that their Oracle had not learned all wisdom, nor was fit to be taken as sole guide, much less as sole defence or satisfaction. He who looks to find all that he needs in men must take many men to find it, and no multiplicity of men will bring him what he seeks. The Milky Way is no substitute for the sun. Our hearts cry out for One great light, for One spacious home. Endless strings of pearls do not reach the preciousness of One pearl of price.

III. The failures of human leaders prophesy the true Leader.

Moses was prophetic of Christ by his failures as by

his successes. He could not do what the people clamoured to have done, and what he in the mood of despair in which the text shows him, sadly owned that he could not. In that very confession he becomes an unconscious prophet. For that he should have so vividly set forth the qualifications of a leader of men, as defined by the people's cries, and should have so bitterly felt his incapacity to supply them, is a witness, if there is a God at all, that somewhere the needed Ideal will be realised in 'a Leader and Commander of the people,' God-sent and 'worthy of more glory than Moses.'

The best service that all human leaders, helpers or lovers, can do us, is to confess their own insufficiency, and to point us to Jesus.

All that men need is found in Him and in Him alone. All that men have failed, and must always fail, to be, He is. Those eyes are blessed that 'see no man any more save Jesus only.' We need One who can satisfy our desires and fill our hungry souls, and Jesus speaks a promise, confirmed by the experience of all who have tested it when He declares: 'He that cometh unto Me shall never hunger.' We need One who will dry our tears, and Jesus, when He says 'Weep not,' wipes them away and stanches their sources, giving 'the oil of joy for mourning.' We need One who can hold us up in our journey, and minister strength to fainting hearts and vigour to weary feet, and Jesus 'strengthens us with might in the inner man.' We need One who will bring us to the promised land of rest, and Jesus brings many sons to glory, and wills that they be 'with Him where He is.' So let us turn away from the multiplicity of human insufficiencies to Him who is our one only help and hope, because He is all-sufficient and eternal.

## AFRAID OF GIANTS

'And Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said unto them, Get you up this way southward, and go up into the mountain: 18. And see the land, what it is; and the people that dwelleth therein, whether they be strong or weak, few or many; 19. And what the land is that they dwell in, whether it be good or bad; and what cities they be that they dwell in, whether in tents, or in strong holds; 20. And what the land is, whether it be fat or lean, whether there be wood therein, or not. And be ye of good courage, and bring of the fruit of the land. Now the time was the time of the firstripe grapes. 21. So they went up, and searched the land from the wilderness of Zin unto Rehob, as men come to Hamath. 22. And they ascended by the south, and came unto Hebron; where Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmi, the children of Anak, were. (Now Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.) 23. And they came unto the brook of Eshcol, and cut down from thence a branch with one cluster of grapes, and they bare it between two upon a staff; and they brought of the pomegranates, and of the figs. 24. The place was called the brook Eshcol, because of the cluster of grapes which the children of Israel cut down from thence. 25. And they returned from searching of the land after forty days. 26. And they went and came to Moses, and to Aaron, and to all the congregation of the children of Israel, unto the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh; and brought back word unto them, and unto all the congregation, and shewed them the fruit of the land. 27. And they told him, and said, We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it. 28. Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great: and, moreover, we saw the children of Anak there. 29. The Amalekites dwell in the land of the south; and the Hittites, and the Jebusites, and the Amorites, dwell in the mountains; and the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and by the coast of Jordan. 30. And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it. 31. But the men that went up with him said, We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we. 32. And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature. 33. And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants; and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.'—NUM. xiii. 17-33.

WE stand here on the edge of the Promised Land. The discussion of the true site of Kadesh need not concern us now. Wherever it was, the wanderers had the end of their desert journey within sight; one bold push forward, and their feet would tread on their inheritance. But, as is so often the case, courage oozed out at the decisive moment, and cowardice, disguised as prudence, called for 'further information,'—that cuckoo-cry of the faint-hearted. There are three steps in this narrative: the despatch of the explorers, their expedition, and the two reports brought back.



I. We have the despatch and instructions of the explorers. A comparison with Deuteronomy i. shows that the project of sending the spies originated in the people's terror at the near prospect of the fighting which they had known to be impending ever since they left Egypt. Faith finds that nearness diminishes dangers, but sense sees them grow as they approach. The people answered Moses' brave words summoning them to the struggle with this feeble petition for an investigation. They did not honestly say that they were alarmed, but defined the scope of the exploring party's mission as simply to 'bring us word again of the way by which we must go up, and the cities into which we shall come.' Had they not the pillar blazing there above them to tell them that? The request was not fathomed in its true faithlessness by Moses, who thought it reasonable and yielded. So far Deuteronomy goes; but this narrative puts another colour on the mission, representing it as the consequence of God's command. The most eager discoverer of discrepancies in the component parts of the Pentateuch need not press this one into his service, for both sides may be true: the one representing the human feebleness which originated the wish; the other, the divine compliance with the desire, in order to disclose the unbelief which unfitted the people for the impending struggle, and to educate them by letting them have their foolish way, and taste its bitter results. Putting the two accounts together, we get, not a contradiction, but a complete view, which teaches a large truth as to God's dealings; namely, that He often lovingly lets us have our own way to show us by the issues that His is better, and that daring, which is obedience, is the true prudence.

The instructions given to the explorers turn on two

points: the eligibility of the country for settlement, and the military strength of its inhabitants. They alternate in a very graphic way from the one of these to the other, beginning, in verse 18, with the land, and immediately going on to the numbers and power of the inhabitants; then harking back again, in verse 19, to the fertility of the land, and passing again to the capacity of the cities to resist attack; and finishing up, in verse 20, with the land once more, both arable and forest. The same double thought colours the parting exhortation to 'be bold,' and to 'bring of the produce of the land.' Now the people knew already both points which the spies were despatched to find out. Over and over again, in Egypt, in the march, and at Sinai, they had been told that the land was 'flowing with milk and honey,' and had been assured of its conquest. What more did they want? Nothing, if they had believed God. Nothing, if they had been all saints,—which they were not. Their fears were very natural. A great deal might be said in favour of their wish to have accurate information. But it is a bad sign when faith, or rather unbelief, sends out sense to be its scout, and when we think to verify God's words by men's confirmation. Not to believe Him unless a jury of twelve of ourselves says the same thing, is surely much the same as not believing Him at all; for it is not He, but they, whom we believe after all.

There is no need to be too hard on the people. They were a mob of slaves, whose manhood had been eaten out by four centuries of sluggish comfort, and latterly crushed by oppression. So far as we know, Abraham's midnight surprise of the Eastern kings was the solitary bit of fighting in the national history thus far; and it is not wonderful that, with such a past, they should

have shrunk from the prospect of bloodshed, and caught at any excuse for delay at least, even if not for escape. 'We have all of us one human heart,' and these cowards were no monsters, but average men, who did very much what average men, professing to be Christians, do every day, and for doing get praised for prudence by other average professing Christians. How many of us, when brought right up to some task involving difficulty or danger, but unmistakably laid on us by God, shelter our distrustful fears under the fair pretext of 'knowing a little more about it first,' and shake wise heads over rashness which takes God at His word, and thinks that it knows enough when it knows what He wills?

II. We have the exploration (verses 21-25). The account of it is arranged on a plan common in the Old Testament narratives, the observation of which would, in many places, remove difficulties which have led to extraordinary hypotheses. Verse 21 gives a general summary of what is then taken up, and told in more detail. It indicates the completeness of the exploration by giving its extreme southern and northern points, the desert of Zin being probably the present depression called the Arabah, and 'Rehob as men come to Hamath' being probably near the northern Dan, on the way to Hamath, which lay in the valley between the Lebanon and the Anti-Lebanon. The account then begins over again, and tells how the spies went up into 'the South.' The Revised Version has done wisely in printing this word with a capital, and thereby showing that it is not merely the name of a cardinal point, but of a district. It literally means 'the dry,' and is applied to the arid stretch of land between the more cultivated southern parts of Canaan and the northern portion of the desert

which runs down to Sinai. It is a great chalky plateau, and might almost be called a steppe or prairie. Passing through this, the explorers next would come to Hebron, the first town of importance, beside which Abraham had lived, and where the graves of their ancestors were. But they were in no mood for remembering such old stories. Living Anaks were much more real to them than dead patriarchs. So the only thing mentioned, besides the antiquity of the city, is the presence in it of these giants. They were probably the relics of the aboriginal inhabitants, and some strain of their blood survived till late days. They seem to have expelled the Hittites, who held Mamre, or Hebron, in Abraham's time. Their name is said to mean 'long-necked,' and the three names in our lesson are probably tribal, and not personal, names. The whole march northward and back again comes in between verses 22 and 23; for Eshcol was close to Hebron, and the spies would not encumber themselves with the bunch of grapes on their northward march. The details of the exploration are given more fully in the spies' report, which shows that they had gone up north from Hebron, through the hills, and possibly came back by the valley of the Jordan. At any rate, they made good speed, and must have done some bold and hard marching, to cover the ground out and back in six weeks. So they returned with their pomegranates and figs, and a great bunch of the grapes for which the valley identified with Eshcol is still famous, swinging on a pole,—the easiest way of carrying it without injury.

III. We have next the two reports. The explorers are received in a full assembly of the people, and begin their story with an object-lesson, producing the great grape cluster and the other spoils. But while honesty

compelled the acknowledgment of the fertility of the land, cowardice slurred that over as lightly as might be, and went on to dilate on the terrors of the giants and the strength of the cities, and the crowded population that held every corner of the country. Truly, the eye sees what it brings with it. They really had gone to look for dangers, and of course they found them. Whatever Moses might lay down in his instructions, they had been sent by the people to bring back reasons for not attempting the conquest, and so they curtly and coldly admit the fertility of the soil, and fling down the fruit for inspection as undeniably grown there, but they tell their real mind with a great 'nevertheless.' Their report is, no doubt, quite accurate. The cities were, no doubt, some of them walled, and to eyes accustomed to the desert, very great; and there were, no doubt, Anaks at Hebron, at any rate, and the 'spies' had got the names of the various races and their territories correctly. As to these, we need only notice that the Hittites were an outlying branch of the great nation, which recent research has discovered, as we might say, the importance and extent of which we scarcely yet know; that the Jebusites held Jerusalem till David's time; that the 'Amorites,' or 'Highlanders,' occupied the central block of mountainous country in conjunction with the two preceding tribes; and that the 'Canaanites,' or 'Lowlanders,' held the lowlands east and west of that hilly nucleus, namely, the deep gorge of the Jordan, and the strip of maritime plain. A very accurate report may be very one-sided. The spies were not the last people who, being sent out to bring home facts, managed to convey very decided opinions without expressing any. A grudging and short admission to begin with, the force of which is immediately broken

by sombre and minute painting of difficulty and danger, is more powerful as a deterrent than any dissuasive. It sounds such an unbiassed appeal to common-sense, as if the reporter said, 'There are the facts; we leave you to draw the conclusions.' An 'unvarnished account of the real state of the case,' in which there is not a single misstatement nor exaggeration, may be utterly false by reason of wrong perspective and omission, and, however true, is sure to act as a shower-bath to courage, if it is unaccompanied with a word of cheer. To begin a perilous enterprise without fairly facing its risks and difficulties is folly. To look at *them* only is no less folly, and is the sure precursor of defeat. But when on the one side is God's command, and on the other such doleful discouragements, they are more than folly, they are sin.

It is bracing to turn from the creeping prudence which leaves God out of the account, to the cheery ring of Caleb's sturdy confidence. His was 'a minority report,' signed by only two of the 'Commission.' These two had seen all that the others had, but everything depends on the eyes which look. The others had measured themselves against the trained soldiers and giants, and were in despair. These two measured Amalekites and Anaks against God, and were jubilant. They do not dispute the facts, but they reverse the implied conclusion, because they add the governing fact of God's help. How differently the same facts strike a man who lives by faith, and one who lives by calculation! Israel might be a row of ciphers, but with God at the head they meant something. Caleb's confidence that 'we are well able to overcome' was religious trust, as is plain from God's eulogium on him in the next chapter (Num. xiv. 24). The lessons from

it are that faith is the parent of wise courage; that where duty, which is God's voice, points, difficulties must not deter; that when we have God's assurance of support, they are nothing. Caleb was wise to counsel going up to the assault 'at once,' for there is no better cure for fear than action. Old soldiers tell us that the trying time is when waiting to begin the fight. 'The native hue of resolution' gets 'sicklied o'er' with the paleness that comes from hesitation. Am I sure that anything is God's will? Then the sooner I go to work at doing it, the better for myself and for the vigour of my work.

This headstrong rashness, as they thought it, brings up the other 'spies' once more. Notice how the gloomy views are the only ones in their second statement. There is nothing about the fertility of the land, but, instead, we have that enigmatical expression about its 'eating up its inhabitants.' No very satisfactory explanation of this is forthcoming. It evidently means that in some way the land was destructive of its inhabitants, which seems to contradict their former reluctant admission of its fertility. Perhaps in their eagerness to paint it black enough, they did contradict themselves, and try to make out that it was a barren soil, not worth conquering. Fear is not very careful of consistency. Note, too, the exaggerations of terror. 'All the people' are sons of Anak now. The size as well as the number of the giants has grown; 'we were in our own sight as grasshoppers.' No doubt they were gigantic, but fear performed the miracle of adding a cubit to their stature. When the coward hears that 'there is a lion without,'—that is, in the open country,—he immediately concludes, 'I shall be slain in the streets,' where it is not usual for lions to disport themselves.

Thus exaggerated and one-sided is distrust of God's promises. Such a temper is fatal to all noble life or work, and brings about the disasters which it foresees. If these cravens had gone up to fight with men before whom they felt like grasshoppers, of course they would have been beaten; and it was much better that their fears should come out at Kadesh than when committed to the struggle. Therefore God lovingly permitted the mission of the spies, and so brought lurking unbelief to the surface, where it could be dealt with. Let us beware of the one-eyed 'prudence' which sees only the perils in the path of duty and enterprise for God, and is blind to the all-sufficient presence which makes us more than conquerors, when we lean all our weight on it. It is well to see the Anakim in their full formidableness, and to feel that we are 'as grasshoppers in our own sight' and in theirs, if the sight drives us to lift our eyes to Him who 'sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof,' however huge and strong, 'are as grasshoppers.'

### WEIGHED, AND FOUND WANTING

'And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night. 2. And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron; and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness! 3. And wherefore hath the Lord brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt? 4. And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt. 5. Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel. 6. And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes. 7. And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land. 8. If the Lord delight in us, then He will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. 9. Only rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the Lord is with us: fear them not. 10. But all the congregation



bade stone them with stones. And the glory of the Lord appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel.'—NUM. xiv. 1-10.

TERROR is more contagious than courage, for a mob is always more prone to base than to noble instincts. The gloomy report of the spies jumped with the humour of the people, and was at once accepted. Its effect was to throw the whole assembly into a paroxysm of panic, which was expressed in the passionate Eastern manner by wild, ungoverned shrieking and tears. What a picture of a frenzied crowd the first verse of this chapter gives! That is not the stuff of which heroes can be made. Weeping endured for a night, but to such weeping there came no morning of joy. When day dawned, the tempest of emotion settled down into sullen determination to give up the prize which hung within reach of a bold hand, ripe and ready to drop. It was one of the moments which come once at least in the lives of nations as of individuals, when a supreme resolve is called for, and when to fall beneath the stern requirement, and refuse a great attempt because of danger, is to pronounce sentence of unworthiness and exclusion on themselves. Not courage only, but belief in God, was tested in this crucial moment, which made a turning-point in the nation's history. Our text brings before us with dramatic vividness and sharpness of contrast, three parties in this decisive hour—the faithless cowards, the faithful four, and the All-seeing presence.

I. Note the faithless cowards. The gravity of the revolt here is partly in its universality, which is emphasised in the narrative at every turn: 'all the congregation' (v. 1), 'all the children of Israel,' 'the whole congregation' (v. 2), 'all the assembly of the congregation' (which implies a solemn formal convocation),

'*all the company*' (v. 7), '*all the congregation*,' '*all the children of Israel*' (v. 10). It was no sectional discontent, but full-blown and universal rebellion. The narrative draws a distinction between the language addressed to Moses, and the whisperings to one another. Publicly, the unanimous voice suggested the return to Egypt as an alternative for discussion, and put it before Moses; to one another they muttered the proposal, which no man had yet courage to speak out, of choosing a new leader, and going back, whatever became of Moses. That could only mean murder as well as mutiny. The whispers would soon be loud enough.

In the murmurs to Moses, observe the distinct and conscious apostacy from Jehovah. They recognise that God '*has brought*' them there, and they slander Him by the assertion that His malignant, deliberate purpose was to kill them all, and make slaves of their wives and children. That was how they read the past, and thought of Him! He had enticed them into His trap, as a hunter might some foolish animal, by dainties strewed along the path, and now they were in the toils, and their only chance of life was to break through. Often, already, had they raised that mad cry—'*back to Egypt!*' but there had never been such a ring of resolve in it, nor had it come from so many throats, nor had any serious purpose to depose Moses been entertained. If we add the fact that they were now on the very frontier of Canaan, and that the decision now taken was necessarily final, we get the full significance of the incident from the mere secular historian's point of view. But its bearing on the people's relation to Jehovah gives a darker colouring to it. It is not merely faint-hearted shrinking from a great opportunity, but

it is wilful and deliberate rejection of His rule, based upon utter distrust of His word. So Scripture treats this event as the typical example of unbelief (Psa. xcvi.; Heb. iii. and iv.). So regarded, it presents, as in a mirror, some of the salient characteristics of that master sin. Bad as it is, it is not out of the range of possibility that it should be repeated, and we need the warning to 'take heed lest any of us should fall after the same example of unbelief.'

We may learn from it the essentials of faith and its opposite. The trust which these cowards failed to exercise was reliance on Jehovah, a personal relation to a Person. In externals and contents, their trust was very unlike the New Testament faith, but in object and essence it was identical. They had to trust in Jehovah; we, in 'God manifest in the flesh.' Their creed was much less clear and blessed than ours, but their faith, if they had had it, would have been the same. Faith is not the belief of a creed, whether man-made or God-revealed, but the cleaving to the Person whom the creed makes known. He may be made known more or less perfectly; but the act of the soul, by which we grasp Him, does not vary with the completeness of the revelation. That act was one for 'the world's grey fathers' and for us. In like manner, unbelief is the same black and fatal sin, whatever be the degree of light against which it turns. To depart from the living God is its essence, and that is always rebellion and death.

Note the short memory and churlish unthankfulness of unbelief. It has been often objected to the story of the Exodus, that such extremity of folly as is ascribed to the Israelites is inconceivable in such circumstances. How could men, with all these miracles in mind, and

manna falling daily, and the pillar blazing every night, and the roll of Sinai's thunders scarcely out of their ears, behave thus? But any one who has honestly studied his own heart, and known its capacity for neglecting the plainest indications of God's presence, and forgetting the gifts of His love, will believe the story, and see brethren in these Israelites. Miracles were less wonderful to them, because they knew less about nature and its laws. Any miracles constantly renewed become commonplace. Habit takes the wonder out of everything. The heart that does not 'like to retain God in its knowledge' will find easy ways of forgetting Him, and revolting from Him, though the path be strewn with blessings, and tokens of His presence flame on every side. True, it is strange that all the wonders and mercies of the past two years had made no deeper impression on these people's hearts; but if they had not done so, it is not unnatural that they had made so slight an impression on their wills. Their ingratitude and forgetfulness are inexplicable, as all sin is, for its very essence is that it has no sufficient reason. But neither is inconceivable, and both are repeated by us every day.

Note the credulity of unbelief. The word of Jehovah had told them that the land 'flowed with milk and honey,' and that they were sure to conquer it. They would not believe Him unless they had verification of His promises. And when they got their own fears reflected in the multiplying mirror of the spies' report, they took men's words for gospel, and gave to them a credence without examination or qualification, which they had never given to God. I think that I have heard of people who inveigh against Christians for their slavish acceptance of the absolute authority of

Jesus Christ, and who pin their faith to some man's teaching with a credulity quite as great as and much less warrantable than ours.

Note the bad bargain which unbelief is ready to make. They contemplated a risky alternative to the brave dash against Canaan. There would be quite as much peril in going back as forward. The march from Egypt had not been so easy; but what would it be when there were no Moses, no Jethro, no manna, no pillar? And what sort of reception would wait them in Egypt, and what fate befall them there? In front, there were perils; but God would be with them. They would have to fight their way, but with the joyous feeling that victory was sure, and that every blow struck, and every step marched, brought them nearer triumphant peace. If they turned, every step would carry them farther from their hopes, and nearer the dreary putting on of the old yoke, which 'neither they nor their fathers were able to bear.' They would buy slavery at as dear a price as they would have to pay for freedom and wealth. Yet they elected the baser course, and thought themselves prudent and careful of themselves in doing so. Is the breed of such miscalculators extinct? Far greater hardships and pains are met on the road of departure from God, than any which befall His servants. To follow Him involves a conflict, but to shirk the battle does not bring immunity from strife. The alternatives are not warfare or peace, God's service or liberty. The most prudent self-love would coincide with the most self-sacrificing heroic consecration, and no man can worse consult his own well-being than in seeking escape from the dangers and toil of enlisting in God's army, by running back through the desert to put his neck in chains in Egypt.

As Moses said: 'Because thou servedst not the Lord thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart for the abundance of all things, therefore thou shalt serve thine enemies, in hunger, and in thirst, and in want of all things.'

II. The faithful four. Moses and Aaron, Caleb and Joshua, are the only Abdiels in that crowd of unbelieving dastards. Their own peril does not move them; their only thought is to dissuade from the fatal refusal to advance. The leader had no armed force with which to put down revolt, and stood wholly undefended and powerless. It was a cruel position for him to see the work of his life crumbling to pieces, and every hope for his people dashed by their craven fears. Is there anywhere a nobler piece of self-abnegation than his prostrating himself before them in the eagerness of his pleading with them for their own good? If anything could have kindled a spark of generous enthusiasm, that passionate gesture of entreaty would have done it. It is like: 'We beseech you, in His stead, be ye reconciled to God.' Men need to be importuned not to destroy themselves, and he will have most success in such God-like work who, as Moses, is so sure of the fatal issues, and so oblivious of all but saving men from self-inflicted ruin, that he sues as for a boon with tears in his voice, and dignity thrown to the winds.

Caleb and Joshua had a different task,—to make one more attempt to hearten the people by repeating their testimony and their confidence. Tearing their dresses, in sign of mourning, they bravely ring out once more the cheery note of assured faith. They first emphatically reiterate that the land is fertile,—or, as the words literally run, 'good exceedingly, exceedingly.' It is right to stimulate for God's warfare by setting forth

the blessedness of the inheritance. 'The recompense of the reward' is not the motive for doing His will, but it is legitimately used as encouragement, in spite of the overstrained objection that virtue for the sake of heaven is spurious virtue. If 'for the sake of heaven,' it is spurious; but it is not spurious because it is heartened by the hope of heaven. In Caleb's former report there was no reason given for his confidence that 'we are well able to overcome.' Thus far all the discussion had been about comparative strength, as any heathen soldier would have reckoned it. But the two heroes speak out the great Name at last, which ought to scatter all fears like morning mist. The rebels had said that Jehovah had 'brought us into this land to fall by the sword.' The two give them back their words with a new turn: 'He will bring us into this land, and give it us.' That is the only antidote to fear. Calculations of comparative force are worse than useless, and their results depend on the temper of the calculator; but, if once God is brought into the account, the sum is ended. When His sword is flung into the scale, whatever is in the other goes up. So Caleb and Joshua brush aside the terrors of the Anaks and all the other bugbears. 'They are bread for us,' we can swallow them at a mouthful; and this was no swaggering boast, but calm, reasonable confidence, because it rested on this, 'the Lord is with us.' True, there was an 'if,' but not an 'if' of doubt, but a condition which they could comply with, and so make it a certainty, 'only rebel not against the Lord, and fear not the people of the land.' Loyalty to Him would give courage, and courage with His presence would be sure of victory. Obedience turns God's 'ifs' into 'verilys.' There, then, we have an outline picture of the

work of faith pleading with the rebellious, heartening them and itself by thoughts of the fair inheritance, grasping the assurance of God's omnipotent help, and in the strength thereof wisely despising the strongest foes, and settling itself immovable in the posture of obedience.

III. The sudden appearance of the all-seeing Lord. The bold remonstrance worked the people into a fury, and fidelity was about to reap the reward which the crowd ever gives to those who try to save it from its own base passions. Nothing is more hateful to resolute sinners than good counsel which is undeniably true. But just as the stones were beginning to fly, the 'glory of the Lord,' that wondrous light which dwelt above the ark in the inmost shrine, came forth before all the awestruck crowd. The stones would be dropped fast enough, and a hush of dread would follow the howling rage of the angry crowd. Our text does not go on to the awful judgment which was proclaimed; but we may venture beyond its bounds to point out that the sentence of exclusion from the land was but the necessary consequence of the temper and character which the refusal to advance had betrayed. Such people were not fit for the fight. A new generation, braced by the keen air and scant fare of the desert, with firmer muscles and hearts than these enervated slaves had, was needed for the conquest. The sentence was mercy as well as judgment; it was better that they should live in the wilderness, and die there by natural process, after having had more education in God's loving care, than that they should be driven unwillingly to a conflict which, in their state of mind, would have been but their butchery. None the less, it is an awful condemnation for a man to be brought by God's provi-



dence face to face with a great possibility of service and of blessing, and then to show himself such that God has to put him aside, and look for other instruments. The Israelites were excluded from Canaan by no arbitrary decree, but by their own faithless fears, which made their victory impossible. 'They could not enter in because of unbelief.' In like manner our unbelief shuts us out from salvation, because we can only enter in by faith; and the 'rest that remains' is of such a nature that it is impossible for even His love to give it to the unbelieving. 'Let us labour, therefore, to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.'

## MOSES THE INTERCESSOR

*'Pardon, I beseech Thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of Thy mercy, and as Thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.'*—NUM. xiv. 19.

SEE how in this story a divine threat is averted and a divine promise is broken, thus revealing a standing law that these in Scripture are conditional.

This striking incident of Moses' intercession suggests to us some thoughts as to

### I. The ground of the divine forgiveness.

The appeal is not based on anything in the people. God is not asked to forgive because of their repentance or their faith. True, these are the conditions on which His pardon is received by us, but they are not the reasons why it is given by Him. Nor does Moses appeal to any sacrifices that had been offered and were conceived to placate God. But he goes deeper than all such pleas, and lays hold, with sublime confidence, on God's own nature as his all-powerful plea. 'The

greatness of Thy mercy' is the ground of the divine forgiveness, and the mightiest plea that human lips can urge. It suggests that His very nature is pardoning love; that 'mercy' is proper to Him, that it is the motive and impulse of His acts. He forgives because He is mercy. That is the foundation truth. It is the deep spring from which by inherent impulse all the streams of forgiveness well up.

What was true when Moses prayed for the rebels is true to-day. Christ's work is the consequence, not the cause, of God's pardoning love. It is the channel through which the waters reach us, but the waters made the channel for themselves.

## II. The persistency of the divine pardon.

'As thou hast forgiven . . . even until now.'

His past is the guarantee of His future. This is true of every one of His attributes. There is no limitation to the divine forgiveness; you cannot exhaust it.

Sometimes there may be long tracts of almost utter godlessness, or times of apathy. Sometimes there may be bursts of great and unsanctified evil after many professions of fidelity, as in David's case. Sometimes there may be but a daily experience in which there is little apparent progress, little consciousness of growing mastery over sin, little of deepening holiness and spiritual power. Be it so! To all such, and to every other form of Christian unfaithfulness, this blessed thought applies.

We are apt to think as if our many pardons in the past made future pardons less likely, whereas the truth is that we have received forgiveness so often in the past that we may be quite sure that it will never fail us in the future. God has established a precedent in His dealings with us. He binds Himself by His past.

As in His creative energy, the forces that flung the whole universe forth were not exhausted by the act, but subsist continually to sustain it, as 'He fainteth not, neither is weary,' so in the works of His providence, and more especially of His grace, there is nothing in the exercise of any of His attributes to exhaust *that* attribute, nothing in the constant appeal which we make to His forgiving grace to weary out that grace. And thus we may learn, even from the unfading glories of the heavens and the undimmed splendours of His creative works, the lesson that, in the holier region of His love, and His pardoning mercy, there is no exhaustion, and that all the past instances of His pardoning grace only make the broader, firmer ground of certainty as to His continuous present and future forgiveness for all our iniquity. He who has proposed to us the 'seventy times seven' as the number of our forgivenesses will not let His own fall short of that tale. Our iniquities may be 'more than the hairs of our heads,' but as the psalmist who found his to be so comforted himself with thinking, God's 'thoughts which are to usward' were 'more than can be numbered.' There would be a pardoning thought for every sin, and after all sins had been forgiven, there would be 'multitudes of redemptions' still available for penitent souls.

There is but one thing that limits the divine pardon, and that is continuous rejection of it.

Whoever seeks to be pardoned is pardoned.

III. The manner of the divine forgiveness.

He pardoned, but He also inflicted punishment, and in both He loves equally. The worst, that is the spiritual, consequences (which are the punishments) of sin, namely separation and alienation from God, He removes in the very act of forgiveness, but His pardon

does not affect the natural consequences. 'Thou wast a God that forgavest them and tookest vengeance of their inventions,' says a psalmist in reference to this very incident. Thank God that He loves us too wisely and well not to let us by experience 'know that it is a bitter thing to forsake the Lord.'

It is a blessing that He does so, and a sign that we are pardoned, if we rightly use it.

#### IV. The vehicle of the divine forgiveness.

The Mediator. Moses here may be taken as a dim shadow of Christ.

'Moses was faithful in all his house,' but Jesus is the true Mediator, whose intercession consists in presenting the constant efficacy of His sacrifice, and to whom God ever says, 'I have pardoned according to Thy word.'

Trust utterly to Him. You cannot weary out the forgiving love of God. 'Christ ever liveth to make intercession'; with God is 'plenteous redemption.' 'He shall redeem Israel out of *all* his iniquities.'

### SERVICE A GIFT

'... I have given your priest's office unto you as a service of gift.'—NUM. xviii. 7.

ALL Christians are priests—to offer sacrifices, alms, especially prayers; to make God known to men.

I. Our priesthood is a gift of God's love.

We are apt to think of our duties as burdensome. They are an honour and a mark of God's grace.

1. They are His gift—

(a) The power to do. All capacities and possessions from Him.

(b) The wish to do. 'Worketh in you to will.'

(c) The right to do, through Christ.

2. They are a blessing.

(a) Note the good effects on ourselves—the increase of fellowship with Him, the strengthening of all holy desires.

(b) The future benefits. Apply this to prayer and to effort on behalf of our fellow-men.

II. Our priesthood is to be done as a service—under a sense of obligation to a master, with diligence (an *ἔργον*, not a *πάρεργον*).

III. Our priesthood is to be done as a gift to God—to be done joyfully, giving ourselves back to Him: ‘Yield yourselves unto God’—‘your reasonable service.’

Then only do we really possess ourselves, and ‘all things are ours, for we are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.’

## THE WATERS OF MERIBAH

Then came the children of Israel, even the whole congregation, into the desert of Zin in the first month: and the people abode in Kadesh; and Miriam died there, and was buried there. 2. And there was no water for the congregation: and they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron. 3. And the people chode with Moses, and spake, saying, Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the Lord! 4. And why have ye brought up the congregation of the Lord into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die there? 5. And wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us in unto this evil place? It is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink. 6. And Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they fell upon their faces: and the glory of the Lord appeared unto them. 7. And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 8. Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink. 9. And Moses took the rod from before the Lord, as He commanded him. 10. And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock? 11. And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also. 12. And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed Me not, to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them. 13. This is the water of Meribah; because the children of Israel strove with the Lord, and He was sanctified in them.—NUM. xx. 1-13.

KADESH had witnessed the final trial and failure of

the generation that came out of Egypt; now we see the first trial and failure of the new generation, thirty-seven years after, on the same spot. Deep silence shrouds the history of these dreary years; but, probably, the congregation was broken up, and small parties roamed over the country, without purpose or hope, while Moses and a few of the leaders kept by the tabernacle. There is a certain emphasis in the phrase of the first verse of this chapter, 'the children of Israel, even the *whole* congregation,' which suggests that this was the first reassembling of the scattered units since the last act of the 'whole congregation.' 'The first month' was, then, the first of the fortieth year, and the gathering was either in obedience to the summons of Moses, who knew that the fixed time had now come, or was the result of common knowledge of the fact. In any case, we have here the first act of a new epoch, and the question to be tried is whether the new men are any better than the old. It is this which gives importance to the event, and explains the bitterness of Moses at finding the old spirit living in the children. It was his trial as well as theirs. He resumed the functions which had substantially been in abeyance for a generation, and by his conduct showed that he had become unfit for the new form which the leadership must take with the invasion of Canaan.

I. We note the old murmurings on the lips of the new generation. The lament of a later prophet fits these hereditary grumblers,—'In vain have I smitten your children; they received no correction.' The place where they reassembled might have taught them the sin of unbelief; their parents' graves should have enforced the lesson. But the long years of wandering, and two millions of deaths, had been useless. The weather-

beaten but sturdy strength of the four old men, the only survivors, might have preached the wisdom of trust in the God in whose 'favour is life.' But the people 'had learned nothing and forgotten nothing.' The old cuckoo-cry, which had become so monotonous from their fathers, is repeated, with differences, not in their favour. They do not, indeed, murmur directly against God, because they regard Moses and Aaron as responsible. 'Why,' say they, 'have ye brought up the congregation of the Lord?' They seem to use that name with a touch of pride in their relation to God, while destitute of any real obedience, and so they show the first traces of the later spirit of the nation. They have acquired cattle while living in the oases of the wilderness, and they are anxious about them. They acknowledge the continuity of national life in their question, 'Wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt?' though most of them had been born in the wilderness. The fear that moved their fathers to unbelief was more reasonable and less contemptible than this murmuring, which ignores God all but utterly, and is ready to throw up everything at the first taste of privation.

It is a signal instance of the solemn law by which the fathers' sins are inherited by the children who prove themselves heirs to their ancestors by repeating their deeds. It is fashionable now to deny original sin, and equally fashionable to affirm 'heredity,' which is the same thing, put into scientific language. There is such a thing as national character persistent through generations, each unit of which adds something to the force of the tendencies which he receives and transmits, but which never are so omnipotent as to destroy individual guilt, however they may lighten it.

Note, too, the awful power of resistance to God's educating possessed by our wills. The whole purpose of these men's lives, thus far, had been to fit them for being God's instruments, and for the reception of His blessing. The desert was His school for body and mind, where muscles and wills were to be braced, and solitude and expectation might be nurses of lofty thoughts, and in the silence God's voice might sound. What better preparation of a hardy race of God-trusting heroes could there have been, and what came of it all? Failure all but complete! The instrument tempered with so much care has its edge turned at the first stroke. The old sore breaks out at the old spot. Man's will has an awful power to thwart God's training; and of all the sad mysteries of this sad mysterious world, this is the saddest and most mysterious, and is the root of all other sadness and mystery,—that a man can set his pin-point of a will against that great Will which gives him all his power, and when God beckons can say, 'I will not,' and can render His most sedulous discipline ineffectual.

Note, too, that trivial things are large enough to hide plain duties and bright possibilities. These men knew that they had come to Kadesh for the final assault, which was to recompense all their hardships. Their desert training should have made them less resourceless and desperate when water failed; but the hopes of conquest and the duty of trust cannot hold their own against present material inconvenience. They even seem to make bitter mockery of the promises, when they complain that Kadesh is 'no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates,' which were the fruits brought by the spies,—as if they had said, 'So this stretch of waterless sand is the fertile land you



talked of, is it? This is all that we have got by re-assembling here.' Do we not often feel that the drought of Kadesh is more real than the grapes of Eshcol? Are we not sometimes tempted to bitter comparisons of the fair promises with the gloomy realities? Does our courage never flag, nor our faith falter, nor swirling clouds of doubt hide the inheritance from our weary and tear-filled eyes? He that is without sin may cast the first stone at these men; but whoever knows his own weak heart will confess that, if he had been among that thirsty crowd, he would, most likely, have made one of the murmurers.

II. Note God's repetition of His old gift to the new generation. Moses makes no attempt to argue with the people, but casts himself in entreaty before the door of the Tabernacle, as if crushed and helpless in face of this heart-breaking proof of the persistent obstinacy of the old faults. God's answer recalls the former miracle at Rephidim (Exodus xvii. 1-7) in the early days of the march, when the same cries had come from lips now silent, and the rock, smitten at God's command by the rod which had parted the sea, yielded water. The only differences are that here Moses is bid to speak, not to smite; and that the miracle is to be done before all the congregation, instead of before the elders only. Both variations seem to have the common purpose of enhancing the wonder, and confirming the authority of Moses, to a generation to whom the old deliverances were only hearsay, and many of whom were in contact with the leader for the first time. The fact that we have here the beginning of a new epoch, and a new set of people, goes far to explain the resemblance of the two incidents, without the need of supposing, with many critics, that they are but different versions of one

'legend.' The repetition of scarcity of water is not wonderful; the recurrence of the murmurings is the sad proof of the unchanged temper of the people, and the repetition of the miracle is the merciful witness of the patience of God. His charity 'is not easily provoked, is not soon angry,' but stoops to renew gifts which had been so little appreciated that the remembrance of them failed to cure distrust. Unbelief is obstinate, but His loving purpose is more persistent still. Rephidim should have made the murmuring at Kadesh impossible; but, if it does not, then He will renew the mercy, though it had been once wasted, and will so shape the second gift that it shall recall the first, if haply both may effect what one had failed to do. When need is repeated, the supply is forthcoming, even when it is demanded by sullen and forgetful distrust. We can wear out men's patience, but God's is inexhaustible. The same long-suffering Hand that poured water from the rock for two generations of distrustful murmurers still lavishes its misused gifts on us, to win us to late repentance, 'and upbraideth not' for our slowness to learn the lessons of His mercies.

III. Note the breaking down at last of the long-trying leader's patience. It is in striking contrast with the patience of God. Psalm cvi. 32, 33, describes the sin of Moses as twofold; namely, anger and speaking 'unadvisedly.' His harsh words, so unlike his pleadings on the former occasion of rebellion at Kadesh, have a worse thing than an outburst of temper in them. 'Must *we* fetch you water out of the rock?' arrogates to himself the power of working miracles. He forgets that he was as much an instrument, and as little a force, as his own rod. His angry scolding betrays wounded personal importance, and annoyance at

rebellion against his own authority, rather than grief at the people's distrust of God, and also a distinct clouding over of his own consciousness of dependence for all his power on God, and an impure mingling of thoughts of self. The same turbid blending of anger and self-regard impelled his arm to the passionately repeated strokes, which, in his heat, he substituted for the quiet words that he was bidden to speak. The Palestinian Targum says very significantly, that at the first stroke the rock dropped blood, thereby indicating the tragic sinfulness of the angry blow. How unworthy a representative of the long-suffering God was this angry man! 'The servant of the Lord must not strive,' nor give the water with which he is entrusted, with contempt or anger in his heart. That gift requires meek compassion in its stewards.

But the failure of Moses' patience was only too natural. The whole incident has to be studied as the first of a new era, in which both leader and led were on their trial. During the thirty-seven years of waiting, Moses had had but little exercise of that part of his functions, and little experience of the people's temper. He must have looked forward anxiously to the result of the desert hardening; he must have felt more remote from and above the children than he did to their parents, his contemporaries who had come with him from Egypt, and so his disappointment must have been proportionately keen, when the first difficulty that rose revealed the old spirit in undiminished force. For forty years he had been patient, and ready to swallow mortifications and ignore rebellion against himself, and to offer himself for his people; but now, when men whom he had seen in their swaddling-clothes showed the same stiff-necked distrust as had killed

their fathers, the breaking-point of his patience was reached. That burst of anger is a grave symptom of lessened love for the sinful murmurers; and lessened love always means lessened power to guide and help. The people are not changed, but Moses is. He has no longer the invincible patience, the utter self-oblivion, the readiness for self-sacrifice, which had borne him up of old, and so he fails. We may learn from his failure that the prime requisite for doing God's work is love, which cannot be moved to anger nor stirred to self-assertion, but meets and conquers murmuring and rebellion by patient holding forth of God's gift, and is, in some faint degree, an echo of His endless long-suffering. He who would serve men must, sleeping or waking, carry them in his heart, and pity their sin. They who would represent God to men, and win men for God, must be 'imitators of God . . . and walk in love.' If the bearer of the water of life offers it with 'Hear, ye rebels,' it will flow untasted.

IV. Note the sentence on the leader, and the sad memorial name. Moses is blamed for not believing nor sanctifying God. His self-assertion in his unadvised speech came from unbelief, or forgetfulness of his dependence. He who claims power to himself, denies it to God. Moses put himself between God and the people, not to show but to hide God; and, instead of exalting God's holiness before them by declaring Him to be the giver, he intercepted the thanks and diverted them to himself. But was his momentary failure not far too severely punished? To answer that question, we must recur to the thought of the importance of this event as beginning a new chapter, and as a test for both Moses and Israel. His failure was a comparatively small matter in itself; and if the sen-

tence is regarded merely as the punishment of a sin, it appears sternly disproportionate to the offence. Were eighty years of faithful service not sufficient to procure the condonation of one moment's impatience? Is not that harsh treatment? But a tiny blade above-ground may indicate the presence of a poisonous root, needing drastic measures for its extirpation; and the sentence was not only punishment for sin, but kind, though punitive, relief from an office for which Moses had no longer, in full measure, his old qualifications. The subsequent history does not show any withdrawal of God's favour from him, and certainly it would be no very sore sorrow to be freed from the heavy load, carried so long. There is disapprobation, no doubt, in the sentence; but it treats the conduct of Moses rather as a symptom of lessened fitness for his heavy responsibility than as sin; and there is as much kindness as condemnation in saying to the wearied veteran, who has stood at his post so long and has taken up arms once more, 'You have done enough. You are not what you were. Other hands must hold the leader's staff. Enter into rest.'

Note that Moses was condemned for doing what Jesus always did, asserting his power to work miracles. What was unbelief and a sinful obtrusion of himself in God's place when the great lawgiver did it, was right and endorsed by God when the Carpenter of Nazareth did it. Why the difference? A greater than Moses is here, when He says to us, 'What will ye that I should do unto you?'

The name of Meribah-Kadesh is given to suggest the parallel and difference with the other miraculous flow of water. The two incidents are thus brought into connection, and yet individualised. 'Meribah,' which

means 'strife,' brands the murmuring as sinful antagonism to God; 'Kadesh,' which means 'holy,' brings both the miracle and the sentence under the common category of acts by which God manifested His holiness to the new generation; and so the double name is a reminder of sin that they may be humble, and of mingled mercy and judgment that they may 'trust and obey.'

### THE POISON AND THE ANTIDOTE

'And they journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way. 5. And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread. 6. And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. 7. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord, and against thee; pray unto the Lord, that He take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. 8. And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. 9. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.'—NUM. xxi. 4-9.

THE mutinous discontent of the Israelites had some excuse when they had to wheel round once more and go southwards in consequence of the refusal of passage through Edom. The valley which stretches from the Dead Sea to the head of the eastern arm of the Red Sea, down which they had to plod in order to turn the southern end of the mountains on its east side, and then resume their northern march outside the territory of Edom, is described as a 'horrible desert.' Certainly it yielded neither bread nor water. So the faithless pilgrims broke into their only too familiar murmurings, utterly ignoring their thirty-eight years of preservation. 'There is no bread.' No; but the manna had fallen day by day. 'Our soul loatheth this light bread.' Yes; but it was bread all the same. Thus

coarse tastes prefer garlic and onions to Heaven's food, and complain of being starved while it is provided. 'There is no water.' No; but the 'rock that followed them' gushed out abundance, and there was no thirst.

Murmuring brought punishment, which was meant for amendment. 'The Lord sent fiery serpents.' That statement does not necessarily imply a miracle. Scripture traces natural phenomena directly to God's will, and often overleaps intervening material links between the cause which is God and the effect which is a physical fact. The neighbourhood of Elath at the head of the gulf is still infested with venomous serpents, 'marked with fiery red spots,' from which, or possibly from the inflammation caused by their poison, they are here called 'fiery.' God made the serpents, though they were hatched by eggs laid by mothers; He brought Israel to the place; He willed the poisonous stings. If we would bring ordinary events into immediate connection with the Divine hand, and would see in all calamities fatherly chastisement 'for our profit,' we should understand life better than we often do.

The swift stroke had fallen without warning or voice to interpret it, but the people knew in their hearts whence and why it had come. Their quick recognition of its source and purpose, and their swift repentance, are to be put to their credit. It is well for us when we interpret for ourselves God's judgments, and need no Moses to urge us to humble ourselves before Him. Conscious guilt is conscious of unworthiness to approach God, though it dares to speak to offended men. The request for Moses' intercession witnesses to the instinct of conscience, requiring a mediator,—an instinct which has led to much superstition and been terribly mis-

guided, but which is deeply true, and is met once for all in Jesus Christ, our Advocate before the throne. The request shows that the petitioners were sure of Moses' forgiveness for their distrust of him, and thus it witnesses to his 'meekness.' His pardon was a kind of pledge of God's. Was the servant likely to be more gracious than the Master? A good man's readiness to forgive helps bad men to believe in a pardoning God. It reflects some beam of Heaven's mercy.

Moses had often prayed for the people when they had sinned, and before they had repented. It was not likely that he would be slow to do so when they asked him, for the asking was accompanied with ample confession. The serpents had done their work, and the prayer that the chastisement should cease would be based on the fact that the sin had been forsaken. But the narrative seems to anticipate that, after the prayer had been offered and answered, Israelites would still be bitten. If they were, that confirms the presumption that the sending of the serpents was not miraculous. It also brings the whole facts into line with the standing methods of Providence, for the outward consequences of sin remain to be reaped after the sin has been forsaken; but they change their character and are no longer destructive, but only disciplinary. 'Serpents' still 'bite' if we have 'broken down hedges,' but there is an antidote.

The command to make a brazen or copper serpent, and set it on some conspicuous place, that to look on it might stay the effect of the poison, is remarkable, not only as sanctioning the forming of an image, but as associating healing power with a material object. Two questions must be considered separately,—What did the method of cure say to the men who turned their



bloodshot, languid eyes to it? and What does it mean for us, who see it by the light of our Lord's great words about it? As to the former question, we have not to take into account the Old Testament symbolism which makes the serpent the emblem of Satan or of sin. Serpents had bitten the wounded. Here was one like them, but without poison, hanging harmless on the pole. Surely that would declare that God had rendered innocuous the else fatal creatures. The elevation of the serpent was simply intended to make it visible from afar; but it could not have been set so high as to be seen from all parts of the camp, and we must suppose that the wounded were in many cases carried from the distant parts of the wide-spreading encampment to places whence they could catch a glimpse of it glittering in the sunshine. We are not told that trust in God was an essential part of the look, but that is taken for granted. Why else should a half-dead man lift his heavy eyelids to look? Such a one knew that God had commanded the image to be made, and had promised healing for a look. His gaze was fixed on it, in obedience to the command involved in the promise, and was, in some measure, a manifestation of faith. No doubt the faith was very imperfect, and the desire was only for physical healing; but none the less it had in it the essence of faith. It would have been too hard a requirement for men through whose veins the swift poison was burning its way, and who, at the best, were so little capable of rising above sense, to have asked from them, as the condition of their cure, a trust which had no external symbol to help it. The singularity of the method adopted witnesses to the graciousness of God, who gave their feebleness a thing that they could look at, to aid them in grasping the

unseen power which really effected the cure. 'He that turned himself to it,' says the Book of Wisdom, 'was not saved by the thing which he saw, but by Thee, that art the Saviour of all.'

Our Lord has given us the deepest meaning of the brazen serpent. Taught by Him, we are to see in it a type of Himself, the significance of which could not be apprehended till Calvary had given the key. Three distinct points of parallel are suggested by His use of the incident in His conversation with Nicodemus. First, He takes the serpent as an emblem of Himself. Now it is clear that it is so, not in regard to the saving power that dwells in Him, but in regard to His sinless manhood, which was made 'in the likeness of sinful flesh,' yet 'without sin.' The symbolism which takes the serpent as the material type of sin comes into view now, and is essential to the full comprehension of the typical significance of the incident.

Secondly, Jesus laid stress on the 'lifting up' of the serpent. That 'lifting up' has two meanings. It primarily refers to the Crucifixion, wherein, just as the death-dealing power was manifestly triumphed over in the elevation of the brazen serpent, the power of sin is exhibited as defeated, as Paul says, 'triumphing over them in it' (Col. ii. 14, 15). But that lifting up on the Cross draws after it the elevation to the throne, and to that, or, rather, to both considered as inseparably united, our Lord refers when He says, 'I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me.'

Thirdly, the condition of healing is paralleled. 'When he looked unto the serpent of brass, he lived.' 'That whosoever believeth may in Him have eternal life.' From the serpent no healing power flowed; but our eternal life is 'in Him,' and from Him it flows into our

poisoned, dying nature. The sole condition of receiving into ourselves that new life which is free from all taint of sin, and is mighty enough to arrest the venom that is diffused through every drop of blood, is faith in Jesus lifted on the Cross to slay the sin that is slaying mankind, and raised to the throne to bestow His own immortal and perfect life on all who look to Him. The bitten Israelite might be all but dead. The poison wrought swiftly; but if he from afar lifted his glazing eyeballs to the serpent on the pole, a swifter healing overtook the death that was all but conqueror, and cast it out, and he who was borne half unconscious to the foot of the standard went away a sound man, 'walking, and leaping, and praising God.' So it may be with any man, however deeply tainted with sin, if he will trust himself to Jesus, and from 'the ends of the earth' 'look unto' Him 'and be saved.' His power knows no hopeless cases. He *can* cure all. He *will* cure our most ingrained sin, and calm the hottest fever of our poisoned blood, if we will let Him. The only thing that we have to do is to gaze, with our hearts in our eyes and faith in our hearts, on Him, as He is lifted on the Cross and the throne. But we must so gaze, or we die, for none but He can cast out the coursing venom. None but He can arrest the swift-footed death that is intertwined with our very natures.

### BALAAM

'He sent messengers therefore unto Balaam the son of Beor to Pethor, which is by the river of the land of the children of his people, to call him, saying, Behold there is a people come out from Egypt: behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me.'—NUM. xxii. 5.

**GIVE** a general outline of the history. See Bishop Butler's great sermon.

I. How much knowledge and love of good there may be in a bad man.

Balaam was a prophet :

(a) He knew something of the divine character.

(b) He knew what righteousness was (Micah v. 8).

(c) He knew of a future state, and longed for 'the last end of the righteous.'

He would not break the law of God, and curse by word of mouth :

But yet for all that he wanted to curse. He wanted to do the wrong thing, and that made him bad. And when he durst not do it in one way, he did it in another.

So he is a picture of the universal blending and mixture that there is even in bad men.

It is not knowledge that makes a man good.

It is not aspirations after righteousness. These dwell more or less in all souls.

It is not desire 'to go to heaven'—everybody has that desire.

Perfectly vicious men are devils. There is always the blending.

Many of us are trusting to these vagrant wishes, but my friends, it is not what a man would sometimes like, but what the whole set and tenor of his life tends towards, that makes him. There may be plenty of backwater eddies and cross-currents in the sea, but the tide goes on all the same.

'All these fancies and their whole array  
One cunning bosom sin blows quite away.'

'Let no man deceive you ; he that doeth righteousness is righteous.'

Do not trust your convictions ; they are powerless in the fight.

II. How men may deceive themselves about their condition, or the self-illusions and compromises of sin.

These convictions will never, by themselves, keep a man from evil, but they may lead men to try to compromise, just as Balaam did. He would go, but he would not, for the life of him, curse; and he evidently thought that he was a hero in firmness and a martyr to duty.

He would not curse in words, but he did it in another way—by means of Baal-peor.

So we find men making compromises between duty and inclination; keeping the letter and breaking the spirit; obeying in some respects and indemnifying themselves for their obedience by their disobedience in others; very devout, attentive to all religious observances, and yet sinning on. And we find such men playing tricks upon themselves, and really deluding themselves into the idea that they are very good men!

This is the great characteristic of sin, its deceitfulness. It always comes as an 'angel of light,' like some of those weird stories in which we read about a strange guest at a banquet who discloses a skeleton below the wedding garment!

'Father of lies.' '*Nihil imbecillius denudato diabolo.*' The more one sins, the less capable he becomes of discerning evil. Conscience becomes sophisticated, and it is always possible to refine away its judgments.

'By reason of use have their senses exercised to discern.' 'Take heed lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.'

III. The absurdity and unreasonableness of unrighteousness.

We look at Balaam, and think, how could a man purpose anything so foolish as to go on seeking for an

opportunity to break a law which he knew to be irrevocable!

Yet what did he do but what every sinner does?

All sin is the breach of law which at the very moment of breaking is known to be imperative.

All sin is thus the overbearing of conscience, or the sophistication of conscience, and all sin is the incurring voluntarily of consequences which at the moment are or might be known to be certain, and far overbalancing any fancied 'wages of unrighteousness.'

Thus all sin is the overbearing of reason or the sophisticating of reason by passion. Men know the absurdity of sin, and yet men will go on sinning. 'A rogue is a roundabout fool.' All wrongdoing is a mighty blunder. It is only righteousness which is congruous with a man's reason, with a man's conscience, with a man's highest happiness. 'The fear of the Lord,' that is wisdom.

#### IV. The wages of unrighteousness.

How Balaam's experiment ended—his death. He tried to make the 'best of both worlds,' so he ran with the hare and hunted with the hounds, and this was how it ended, as it always does, as it always will. How death ends all the illusions, sternly breaks down all the compromises, reveals all the absurdities!

Men are one thing or the other. Learn, then, the lesson that no gifts, no talents, no convictions, no aspirations will avail.

Let this sad figure which looks out upon us with grey streaming hair and uplifted hands from beside the altar on Pisgah speak to us.

How near the haven it is possible to be cast away! Like Bunyan's way to hell from near the gate of the celestial city.

Balaam said, 'Let me die the death of the righteous!' and his death was thus:—'Balaam they slew with the sword,' and his epitaph is 'Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness,' got them, and perished!

### AN UNFULFILLED DESIRE

'... Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!'—NUM. xxiii. 10.

'... Balaam also the son of Beor they slew with the sword.'—NUM. xxxi. 8.

PONDER these two pictures. Take the first scene. A prophet, who knows God and His will, is standing on the mountain top, and as he looks down over the valley beneath him, with its acacia-trees and swift river, there spread the tents of Israel. He sees them, and knows that they are 'a people whom the Lord hath blessed.' Brought there to curse, 'he blesses them altogether'; and as he gazes upon their ordered ranks and sees somewhat of the wondrous future that lay before them, his mind is filled with the thought of all the blessedness of that righteous nation, and the sigh of longing comes to his lips, 'May I be with them in life and death; may I have no higher honour, no calmer end, than to lie down and die as one of the chosen people, with memories of a divine hand that has protected me all through the past, and quiet hopes of the same hand holding me up in the great darkness!' A devout aspiration, a worthy desire!

Look at the other picture. Midian has seduced Israel to idolatry and its constant companion, sensual sin. The old lawgiver has for his last achievement to punish the idolater. 'Avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites, afterwards thou shalt be gathered to

thy people.' So each tribe gives its contingent to the fight, and under the fierce and prompt Phinehas, whose javelin had already smitten one of the chief offenders, they go forth. Fire and sword, devastation and victory, mark their track. The princes of Midian fall before the swift rush of the desert-born invaders. And—sad, strange company!—among them is the 'man who saw the vision of the Almighty, and knew the knowledge of the Most High'! he who had taught Moab the purest lessons of morality, and Midian, alas! the practice of the vilest profligacy; he who saw from afar 'the sceptre arise out of Israel and the Star from Jacob'; he who longed to 'die the death of the righteous'! The onset of the avenging host, with the 'shout of a king' in their midst; the terror of the flight, the riot of havoc and bloodshed, and, finally, the quick thrust of the sharp Israelite sword in some strong hand, and the grey hairs all dabbled with his blood—these were what the man came to who had once breathed the honest desire, 'Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his'!

I. There is surely a solemn lesson for us all here—as touching the danger of mere vague religious desires and convictions which we do not allow to determine our conduct.

Balaam had evidently much knowledge. Look at these points—

(a) His knowledge of the covenant-name of God.

(b) His knowledge of a pure morality and a spiritual worship far beyond sacrificial notions, and in some respects higher than the then Old Testament standpoint.

(c) The knowledge (which is implied in the text) of a future state, which had gone far into the back-



ground, even if it had not been altogether lost, among the Israelites. Is it not remarkable that the religious ideas of this man were in advance of Israel's at this time; that there seems to have lingered among these 'outsiders' more of a pure faith than in Israel itself?

What a lesson here as to the souls led by God and enlightened by Him beyond the pale of Judaism!

But all this knowledge, of what use was it to Balaam? He knows about God: does he seek to serve Him? He preaches morality to Moab, and he teaches Midian to 'teach the children of Israel to commit fornication.' He knows something of the blessedness of a 'righteous man's' death, and perhaps sees faintly the shining gates beyond—but how does it all end? What a gulf between *knowledge* and *life*!

What is the use of correct ideas about God? They may be the foundations of holy thoughts, and they are meant to be so. I am not setting up emotion above principle, or fancying that there can be religion without theology; but for what are all our thoughts about God given us?

- (a) That they may influence our hearts.
- (b) That they may subdue our wills.
- (c) That they may mould our practical life.

If they do not do that—then *what* do they do?

They constitute a positive hindrance—like the dead lava-blocks that choke the mouth of a crater, or the two deposits on the bottom of a boiler, soot outside and crust inside, which keep the fire from getting at the water. They have lost their power because they are so familiar. They are weakened by not being practised. The very organs of intelligence are, as it were, ossified. Self-complacency lays hold on the possession of these ideas and shields itself against

all appeals with the fact of possessing them. Many a man mistakes, in his own case, the knowledge of the truth for obedience to the truth. All this is seen in everyday life, and with reference to all manner of convictions, but it is most apparent and most fatal about Christian truth. I appeal to the many who hear and know all about 'the word.' What more is needed? That you should do what you know ('Be not hearers only'); that you should yield your whole being to Christ, the living Word.

II. Balaam is an example of convictions which remain inefficacious.

It was not without some sense of his own character, and some forebodings of what was possibly brooding over him, that he uttered these words of the text. But they were transitory emotions, and they passed away.

I suppose that every man who hears the gospel proclaimed is, at some time or other, conscious of dawning thoughts which, if followed, would lead him to decision for Christ. I suppose that every man among us is conscious of thoughts visiting him many a time when he least expects them, which, if honestly obeyed, would work an entire revolution in his life.

I do not wish to speak as if unbelieving men were the only people who were unfaithful to their consciences, but rather to deal with what is a besetting sin of us all, though it reaches its highest aggravation in reference to the gospel.

Such stings of conviction come to us all, but how are they deadened?

(a) By simple neglect. Pay no attention to them; do not do anything in consequence, and they will gradually disappear. The voice unheard will cease to

speak. Non-obedience to conscience will in the end almost throttle conscience.

(b) By angry rejection.

(c) By busy occupation with the outer world.

(d) By sinful occupation with it.

Then consider that such dealing with our convictions leaves us far worse men than before, and if continued will end in utter insensibility.

What should we do with such convictions? Reverently follow them. And in so doing they will grow and increase, and lead us at last to God and peace.

Special application of all this to our attitude towards Christian truth.

III. Balaam is an instance of wishes that are never fulfilled.

He wished to die 'as the righteous.' How did he die? miserably; and why?

(1) Because his wish was deficient in character.

It was *one* among a great many, feeble and not predominant, occasioned by circumstances, and so fading when these disappeared. Like many men's relation to the gospel who would *like* to be Christians, and are not. These vagrant wishes are nothing; mere 'catpaws' of wind, not a breeze. They are not real, even while they last, and so they come to nothing.

(2) Because it was partially wrong in its object.

He was willing to die the death, but not to live the life, of the righteous; like many men who would be very glad to 'go to heaven when they die,' but who will not be Christians while they live.

Now, God forbid that I should say that his wish was wrong! But only it was not enough. Such a wish led to no action.


Now, God hears the faintest wish; He does not

require that we should will strongly, but He does require that we should desire, and that we should act according to our desires.

Let the close be a brief picture of a righteous death. And oh! if you feel that it is blessed, then let that desire lead you to Christ, and all will be well. Remember that Bunyan saw a byway to hell at the door of the celestial city. Remember how Balaam ended, and stands gibbeted in the New Testament as an evil man, and the type of false teachers. Finally, beware of knowledge which is not operative in conduct, of convictions which are neglected and pass away, of vague desires which come to nought.



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